

# Editorial

**W**hy another journal? 'Aren't there already enough on the market?' 'We hardly have time to read all the correspondence that comes through our letter-boxes every day, let alone a new journal'.

We can sympathise with these and other comments which may well greet this first issue of *The Rutherford Journal of Church & Ministry*. So it may not be altogether out of place to offer some reasons why the Council of Rutherford House, Edinburgh, has taken the step of sponsoring a new journal.

## The Ministry of the Word

There are three topics which are going to feature in some form or another in every issue of *The Rutherford Journal*. The first of these is preaching.

There can be no doubt about it, within the historic denominations confidence in preaching has been deeply shaken in recent years. There are those within the Church of Scotland who have explicitly stated that they are working towards the day when the sermon will be removed altogether from church services. The technological revolution and advances in cybernetics lead many to suggest that a monologue by one person standing 'six feet above contradiction' is no way to communicate with modern people. And, because many have lost faith in the Bible as the living Word of God, the sermon has become a stumbling, stammering apology which moves no one because it says nothing. The people have become bored!

Yet men and women are hungry for a living word from the living God. Paul declares that 'through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who

believe' (1 Cor. 1:21). In the centre of every church stands a pulpit—symbol of the churches' recognition down the generations that when God's people gather for worship, central to that worship is the proclamation of the Word. That is why the apostles refused to allow themselves to be side-tracked from this aspect of their ministry (Acts 6:2).

*The Rutherford Journal* is being launched with this clear priority of encouraging, assisting and strengthening the preaching work of our churches. Each issue of *The Journal* will carry an article on expository preaching. Side by side with that will be printed a sermon of one of the giants of the faith from whom we have received our reformed tradition.

## The Ministry of Prayer

A second explicit emphasis of this journal will be to encourage and inspire intercessory prayer. For not only did the apostles in the early days of the church refuse to be deflected from the ministry of the Word, they also resolved to devote themselves to prayer (Acts 6:4).

The act of prayer is at very least a two-fold declaration. On the one hand, prayer eloquently speaks of our complete helplessness. For who turns to pray when he can manage perfectly well on his own? Or who needs the help of an Other when his objectives can be attained unaided? On the other hand, prayer is an unmistakable signal that our eyes are upon our God. For in prayer we

turn from all that is human and fallible to the One who is divine and omnipotent. Through the act of the humble prayer of contrite hearts, those praying cast themselves upon the Lord without whose intervention there can be no hope.

Therefore, *The Rutherford Journal* will also seek in every issue to remind and challenge its readers of the ministry of prayer.

## God-Authenticated Ministries

Within this context of the ministry of the Word and prayer, there is a third explicit purpose of this new journal. It is our conviction that God's will for his Church is that she should be authenticated by himself, so that she is seen and known wherever she exists to be the custodian of the Gospel and the instrument of his saving grace. That means that churches should be clearly recognised by men and women as places where God can most certainly be found and where his word can plainly be heard.

Now that is a bold claim. When one thinks of many struggling (and, alas, dying) congregations in our land today, it is at once evident that many ministries have certainly not attained as yet the distinction of being authenticated by God.

Consider the prayer of Elijah on Carmel: *O Lord God...let it be known today that you are God, and that I am your servant, and have done all these things at your command...* (1 Kings 18:36).

Elijah was praying that God would authenticate his ministry. In other words, that he would bring a backslidden people to acknowledge that what he had said and done was truly in accordance with the mind and will of God. Nor is this a principle that is restricted to the work and prayer of Elijah. It can be illustrated from the ministries of all the

prophets and preachers of Scripture. It is a principle which we believe still obtains today.

Not that we look so much for 'signs and wonders' (though God does sometimes give them). God often prefers to work quietly and unobtrusively for the simple reason that men and women are far too quickly distracted from His glory by the excitement engendered through remarkable events. But nevertheless, the purpose of God is to honour his Word, and, where it is faithfully and comprehensively preached, to authenticate it so that both those within and those outside the church will acknowledge that God himself is speaking and is at work.

Now this is no light or easy matter. For any ministry to be so authenticated by God himself will take years of dogged toil, hours of faithful prayer, a mind which constantly feeds upon the Scriptures and a life which is lived in company with God. Many deaths will have to be died, and many resurrections entered into. There will often have to be brokenness before God, submission to his will, and obedience to His ways. Much in the preacher that is human (in the fallen sense) will have to be repeatedly renounced, until much that is divine unobtrusively appears. There will have to grow in the Lord's servant a grace and tenderness, as well as a strength and stedfastness. But above all, the ministry which is to be God-authenticated will have to be characterised by the holy passion of the love of the Saviour giving itself without reserve, first to God and then to those to whom the preacher is sent.

It will be the aim of this journal to offer simple practical and devotional help towards just such a ministry. Our appeal will be addressed to ministers; and also to elders and deacons, for they must understand the demands God lays on his servants, and become fellow-workers with them to support them as Aaron and Hur supported Moses, if God is going to set his own divine seal upon the work.

### **Defiant Living Hope**

There is not much hope in many churches of Western Europe today. The widespread mood in our land is one of

cynicism and despair—rarely hope. The disillusionment within society is evident on every hand. There is growing darkness over the future of the human race.

An American research student in Cambridge commented to a friend of mine: 'We Americans used to trust our generals, and then came Vietnam; so we trusted our politicians, but then came Watergate; so we trusted our scientists, but then came Three-Mile Island; so we trusted our economists, but then came unemployment—now there is no one left to trust'.

Living hope must be a distinguishing mark of true believers, for Christ has given us *the blessed hope* of his return to consummate and establish his kingdom. Therefore, the Christian hope will always undergird our journal—the defiant, vibrant, glorious hope of the Gospel.

We pray that this *blessed hope* will also characterise evangelical ministries and churches, so that those who see no hope whatsoever for our world and its civilisations may be attracted to the Lord of History in whose hands the future, and our personal destinies, is surely safe.

# From

Not only was the Teacher wise, but also he imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true. The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one Shepherd. Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them (Ecc.12:9–12).

# To

# Text

Let me begin with a couple of comments by two young ministers I know. The first stood up at a conference I was attending and said this: 'We Presbyterians have all of the truth, we know all there is to know, there is nothing more to be added to what we already know. So why do we need a Doctrine Committee?' That is absolutely true. I heard it with my own ears! I suppose the only bit of his statement that some of us might have sympathy with is the question, 'Why do we need a Doctrine Committee?'

The second incident is of a minister chatting to a close personal friend of mine. The minister was speaking about his congregation. He said: 'We have almost reached full maturity in our church. Only two areas remain for us to improve on: to tighten up a bit more on Sabbath observance, and to persuade the 5% of members who are not yet total abstainers to take the pledge. Otherwise we're there'. Again, absolutely true! Two young ministers who both believed that (in different ways) they had 'arrived' and had nothing more to learn!

Why do I quote those two incidents? Because as you and I open our Bibles to prepare, it is important that we come to Scripture with humble hearts, open minds and responsive wills, ready to hear God speaking to us, and able to learn from the Scriptures. How can we expect our people to be teachable if we are not teachable ourselves?

What I am about to do is to offer some general principles. In a brief article like this, detail is quite impossible. For ex-

ample, if my text is Ephesians 2:1, I am going to tackle it rather differently to the way I would if it were Exodus 2:1. Likewise, I cannot treat the poetry of the Psalms in the same way as I might treat the historical narratives of Genesis, far less, as I would want to treat the doctrinal passages of Romans. So I only offer a few very general principles.

Also, whatever I might write about preaching will be severely limited by my own experience. The preacher is never satisfied. We never 'arrive' as preachers. We always long to present Christ more winsomely, more persuasively, more faithfully. But there is no full-proof way of becoming an effective or an accomplished preacher.

Preaching is inextricably bound up with our personalities and temperaments. Your sermon cannot be separated from you and the person you are. There will always be some of you in it. Therefore, what I say will necessarily be limited in its value, because it comes from my own limited experience.

we step right back to see it as part of the whole picture.

That might illustrate our first approach to our text or passage. We must begin by reading the text, re-reading it, and re-reading it again; following its every line and curve, coming at it from every angle. We then step back a little, and we see it in its immediate context. We see how it relates to what has gone before, and to what follows. We read and re-read the whole chapter, examining our text all the time in its immediate context. Finally we stand right back to view it as part of the whole book, and even as part of the whole Bible.

Preachers will have beside them several commentaries. But before you open them, let the text, the chapter and the entire book make their own impression on your heart and mind. Take notes of that impression. Write down and keep in front of you what you see during the first readings and re-readings of the text and passage. Only when you have saturated your mind in the Word of God should you turn to your commentaries.

## Commentaries

### STAGE ONE The Preparatory Work

Most of us must have visited some stately home or mediaeval castle and seen a great tapestry covering a whole wall. One detail of the tapestry takes our imagination and we get as close as we can to examine it. Then we step back a little to see the detail in its relationship to the needlework adjacent to it, and finally

A brief word on the commentaries. I have found it helpful to use four or five commentaries. Always a commentary on the basic Hebrew or Greek text to make sure I have understood and ascertained correctly its meaning. (May I say, you need very little Greek and Hebrew to use works such as Keil & Delitzsch and Alford's Greek Testament). Then, usually, Calvin's commentary. And then another three or four. You may find one

# Sermon

commentary has nothing to say of any value to you on a particular text, and yet, on next week's text it may offer some real light.

After years of skimming commentaries, I have adopted the practice of keeping a hardback note book for each series of sermons I am doing, and writing down the useful information from each commentary on the text I'm studying. I leave plenty of room on each page for further notes. I wish I had adopted that practice years ago. It was recommended by my homeletics teacher, E. F. Kevan. In the short term, it takes time. In the long term, it repays the effort, because it conserves the work one does.

So I would spend perhaps a couple of hours working at the text with commentaries and gathering together and noting down material I think may be helpful.

### Printed Sermons

Perhaps I should say a word at this point about reading other preachers' sermons on the text, e.g., Martyn Lloyd-Jones'. The problem with reading someone like MLJ's sermons is that you can be taken over by them, and you then find that you are doing little more than re-preaching what Lloyd-Jones preached, only doing it very badly. I have heard preachers saying that for this reason they have stopped reading his sermons.

Is there any way to overcome this problem which some of us face, for there is much to be learned from printed ser-

hardback notebook. I find this helps me to be able to stand back, survey what he is saying, and detach myself from it.

The problem with Lloyd-Jones, of course, is that if you are studying a text, say in Ephesians, you may have to do that with two or three sermons to master what he is saying about just one text. So that is what I do, and I believe the labour is justified.

Now all this belongs to stage one. Half an hour to forty minutes alone with your Bible. Then the work at the commentaries, until you've milked them for all they can yield. Then any sermons of other preachers you may have on your text. I suspect that this first stage will have taken you up to four hours, though obviously it will vary and will depend on how quickly you work.

### Theological Framework

A question about stage one. What am I doing? What is happening as I read and study? Let's focus for a moment on the actual thought processes as we have been examining in detail 'the tapestry' of biblical truth.

We all have a theological framework, a body of doctrine we have learned over the years and made our own. We cannot study in any detail a text or passage from Scripture without relating it in some way to our theological framework. The all-important point is how the text we are studying relates to the theological framework we already have.

Go back to the young minister who

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mons? What I do is to read his sermon a first time, taking notes of his argument, and summarising the various main points with their sub-headings. I then read the sermon a second time, carefully marking in the book the main points, and, using three or four different coloured pencils to high-light the sub-divisions. Finally, I read the sermon a third time, making a one page summary of it in my

had all the truth and had nothing more to learn. What that young man would invariably do in his sermon preparation would be to impose upon the text his theological framework. He couldn't do anything else, could he? Because, in his mind, he has the truth already—all of it. So every text will simply illustrate a section of the grid of his framework. But he is static, and worse still, the Word of

God in his sermon preparation has become static too. There is no expansion of his mind, no growth, no progress. He thinks he has arrived, and therefore can go no further.

I recently heard a sermon on the parable of The Sheep and the Goats. But what the preacher did was to preach on justification by faith. I confess I sat in sheer amazement at the ingenuity of his reasoning as he succeeded in squeezing the parable into a shape it could seldom ever have had in any sermon. And though the point was perfectly valid, I honestly don't believe that was in any way the point the Lord was making in that parable. It was about the most notable example I had ever heard of imposing a framework on a text, and binding (even silencing) the Word of God as a result.

Let me offer an illustration of the relationship of the text of your sermon to your theological framework. When I was minister of Newhills in rural Aberdeenshire, we had a Manse set in four acres of grounds. One acre was walled garden. For ten years, I toiled at that garden. It was very fruitful. We had no deep freeze, but we bottled about 200lbs of gooseberries, raspberries and blackcurrants each summer, and we were, for at least eight months in the year, self-sufficient in vegetables.

But for all the fruitfulness of the garden, there still remained work undone, large areas undeveloped, weeds that needed to be removed, a lawn full of daisies and plantons; bushes that ought to have been trimmed, and herbaceous borders that needed cutting back. All that quite apart from the three acres of grounds outside the walled garden, and those additional three acres could have been beautiful, but more or less ran wild.

Our work on the text should be developing the garden of our theological framework. It should be eradicating some weeds, turning over some new soil, encouraging some new growth. There must be a dynamic interaction constantly going on between text and framework. The Word must be powerful and active, speaking to our hearts, opening new areas of thought, confirming certain truths, expanding and developing other

truths, cutting back on yet others.

Now this is the wisdom and knowledge of which Ecclesiastes 12:9 speaks: 'Not only was the Teacher wise, but also he imparted knowledge to the people'. Follow up yourselves what the Scriptures say about the source and nature of wisdom. You may even discover that the

in our minds.

May I share with you a problem which I often have at this stage. As I read through the notes I have taken, and begin to sort out the teaching and its message from my text, I discover that I have gathered enough material for two, three or even four sermons on that one

preached. My own spiritual growth would have been impeded, because I would have simply studied Genesis 17 to extract enough for my one previously intimated sermon, and a whole rich realm of God's Word would have remained for years, perhaps for all of my life, undiscovered and unknown.

## ***The preacher is like a gold prospector. You are digging away, and you suddenly strike a seam of gold.***

word 'knowledge' in that verse triggers a lifelong journey through Scripture learning about the place of the mind in our personalities as we are created in the image of God, and the relationship of our minds to our wills and our emotions, and the part the knowledge of God plays in those relationships.

### **STAGE TWO**

#### **The Message**

The problem with stage one is that some preachers consider it to be stage one, two and three. As a result what they serve up on Sunday to their longsuffering congregations is their background notes. Their sermons at times remind me of my experience of army cooks: hunks of half-cooked food thrown on a cold greasy plate. No tender simmering of the meat, no appetisingly presented vegetables, no sauce or gravy or garnishing. Out of all the bad sermons we hear, those which are chunks of half-cooked, half-prepared background notes must be the most common. What, then, is stage two?

As we preachers toil away in our studies, examining the truths of Scripture and seeking to understand the implications of those truths, something should be happening. The notes that we have been taking will be suggesting to us great principles of grace enshrined in our text or passage. The Word will have been speaking to us, tugging at our wills, goading our consciences, delighting our hearts. And a message will be forming

text. I wonder if you have ever done the same? I am sure you have. The problem becomes not so much what to say as what to leave out.

#### **Planned Programmes of Preaching**

May I point out that this discovery of so many treasures and so much material in one text immediately casts grave doubts on the practice of some preachers who plan their sermon titles six months ahead. A few years ago, I had to undergo surgery on my inner ear. I was called unexpectedly into hospital, and so had to fix up pulpit supply for the coming weeks. Two of the ministers I telephoned declined to preach for me because they had already published six months in advance the titles of their sermons and had they agreed to help me, and so been away a Sunday from their own pulpits, their preaching programme would have been thrown out of order.

But the preacher is like a gold prospector. You are digging away, and you suddenly strike a seam of gold—solid nuggets—that you never realised were there.

I recall years ago preaching through Genesis. I came to Genesis 17, and my first reading suggested one sermon on the Covenant God made with Abraham. As I began to dig I struck gold, and we were nearly six Sundays in that chapter, and of all the sermon tapes my people still order, some of the sermons on Genesis 17 have been most in demand. But just say I had flicked through Genesis and drawn up a tidy little scheme? Those sermons would never have been

#### **The Burden**

Back then to the message. It has begun to form itself in your heart and mind. The message is forming—and that message must now become the burden of the sermon. Because every sermon must have a burden. What do I mean by a burden? Exactly what I say. Each sermon must be like a weight on our hearts, carried deep in the soul. It must contain something of the truth of God, some diamond, some precious stone, that we are to impart.

Have you ever walked down the street with several thousand pounds in bank notes in your bag? You are a little anxious about that bag, and where you lay it down. It's heavy on your mind—'I have £5000 in notes in this bag, and I must guard it and get it lodged safely in the bank'. The preacher is like that. In possession of treasure, and that treasure you have, the message you are going to impart, is a burden you gladly carry, just as you gladly carry the £5000 in notes to the bank.

Beware of the sermon with no burden. If there's no burden, then back to your Bible, back to your desk, back to your knees, until there is one. Please don't stand to preach and offer your people mere straw. To change the figure, go into the pulpit laden with the finest of wheat with which to feed the flock of God. If you want justification from my text for the burden of a sermon, read on to v.14: 'For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil'. There, surely, is burden enough for us all.

### **STAGE THREE**

#### **Writing the Sermon**

I want to suggest five principles that I

have found useful as I get down to the work of actually writing a sermon. There are many, many other points we could make, but we must restrict ourselves in this article to these five.

### 1. Structure

A structure that is logical, simple and easy for your congregation to follow cannot be bad! See Ecclesiastes 12:9b: 'The Teacher... pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs...' It's that order which I believe to be of great importance.

The importance of a clear and ordered structure first came home to me when I attended All Souls Church in London during my days as a student there. I clearly recall that after hearing John Stott preach I would carry about in my head all week almost the whole of his sermon I had heard the previous Sunday. I recall the pleasure and the benefit of that. One reason why I was able to remember John Stott's sermons was the simplicity and beauty of his sermon structure's transparently logical order.

I have far more scriptural support for an ordered structure in a sermon than simply Ecclesiastes 12:9. I believe that significant areas of our Bibles have a similar order. Henri Blocher points out in his commentary on Genesis 1-3 that the sentences of the Hebrew in those early chapters of Genesis are written in multiples of sevens. There is a carefully devised order, a sophisticated structure, about the Genesis tablets of chapters 1-3 which is skilful and deliberate.

Look at the structure of the Psalms. I hope you have at least begun to be aware of the artistry and complexity of the poetic style of the Hebrew Bible. You'll know that Hebrew poetry is based on parallelism, that is, one statement followed by the same statement expressed in a different form of words. But have you discovered the many different forms of parallelism in the Psalms: Synonymous, Antithetic, Synthetic, Introverted, Iterative, Responsory, Climacteric, and Alternate. Structure cannot be either bad or unhelpful when the Holy Spirit chose such a sophisticated and beautiful form of poetry to unveil so much truth of God as we have

in the Psalms.

Or if you are still unconvinced, look at the Sermon on the Mount. Look, for example, at the Beatitudes. You will find in Lloyd-Jones exposition (Vol.1.X) a most helpful and exciting indication of the very deliberate structure which our Lord deliberately gave those sayings: three steps upward on to a plateau, followed by another three steps up to a

trying to understand Virgil in the Latin class, 'he painfully construed and darkly understood'. What a damning indictment of any of our sermons if they should ever be painfully construed and darkly understood!

Another way of putting it is that the preacher announces his text, jumps in at the shallow end, splashes about without swimming either a length or even a

### *Don't begin any point in your sermon by blasting off into outer space, I mean by launching into theology.*

second plateau, and each of the second three steps correspond to, and form couplets with, the first three steps. Similarly, the first plateau ('Blessed are those who hunger after righteousness...'), corresponds to, and forms a couplet with, the second plateau ('Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake...'). The logical orderliness of the Lord's teaching in the Beatitudes is quite amazing.

Or again, in the Sermon on the Mount, we find deliberate and very obvious structure in the first half of Matthew 6 where the Lord lays before us the three great relationships of life in which lie the secret of righteousness—the horizontal relationship ('When you give to the needy...') followed by the vertical relationship ('When you pray...') followed by the inner personal relationship ('When you fast...') and each of these three relationships is dealt with in words carefully chosen, and deliberately cast in a very similar structure. A structure easily understood, remembered and followed.

If we have eyes to see it, our Bibles are full of structure and symmetry. God is a God of order and beauty. It is therefore both good and godly that our sermons should have a clear structure that is logical and enables our congregation easily to follow the teaching we are giving. We've all had the experience of listening to sermons which had no order, no logic, and we felt like the young Gibbon who tells us that as a schoolboy

breadth, and then climbs out again, wet and bedraggled; meanwhile, the wondering congregation are left perplexed and baffled as to what it has all been about.

Structure. For all that Martin Lloyd-Jones condemns natty, alliterative points in a sermon, I can assure you that his own sermons, when you analyse them, have a structure and can usually be divided into consecutive and logical points, each of which he deals with in a general way, then a particular way, both negatively and positively.

### 2. 'Earthing'

I recall listening to a sermon a year or two ago, and what happened was this. The preacher announced his text and then immediately took off into the glorious blue heavens of God's truth, and he stayed aloft for forty minutes, taking great leaps from cloud to cloud, and staying in the heavenlies while he preached. It was a remarkable performance. He propounded sound Christian doctrine. He was 'a good man', as they say in Ulster. But after announcing his text, his feet never once touched the earth until at last, having explored the outer universe, he fired his retro-rockets, re-entered time and space, and landed in time to pick up the Church Hymnary for the final singing.

Our preaching must be earthed. I myself have never yet discovered in the Bible any 'pure theology'. My Bible doesn't have any. What I find in my Bi-

ble (you may have a different edition to mine!) is that its theology is all 'practical theology'. We have the Divine Indicatives at once followed by the Divine Imperatives. We have always the 'therefore': God has done this, therefore! In other words—practical theology, that is, theology that is earthed.

I suspect that what Paul saw when he was caught up into the third heaven was pure theology. He heard inexpressible things that a man is not permitted to tell. But what the preacher must tell is that the Word has become flesh and made his dwelling among us. Theology must be incarnational.

Yes, we do take off in our sermons into the blue heavens of divine truth. But having grasped a chunk of heavenly truth, we then descend to earth and share it with men and women whose feet are not only firmly planted in the clay of this earth, but are actually made of clay as well. So earth your theology. Let the lightning of God's Word be conducted down that earth cable, through the pulpit and into the pews of your church.

I have found it helpful always to begin a sermon with my feet planted firmly on the earth. What do I mean? Begin by introducing some problem which your text is going to solve, or on which it will throw some light. Don't begin any point in your sermon by blasting off into outer space, I mean by launching into theology. Begin by talking about 'the here and now'.

'A harrassed mother, laden with her shopping, is sitting on the top deck of the bus on her way home. As the bus trundles along, she gazes at the big houses with double garages and sleek cars parked outside, she catches glimpses of beautiful gardens, and the rich interiors of finely furnished homes. And as she at last climbs off the bus, her corns hurting and her legs aching, she sighs as she opens the door of her little council flat and thinks how wonderful it would be to have—lots of money! And she tells herself she must try again and fill in the football coupons this week—one never knows, she might just strike it rich and win a fortune...'

Needless to say, my text comes from Matthew 6:19ff.—and the second half

of that chapter deals with possessions and our attitude towards them. But we've begun on earth, and we are going to keep on coming back to earth. Authentic preaching must be constantly earthed.

### 3. Pictorial language

I offer two examples of preachers who use pictorial language and whose sermons you can easily get hold of to see what I mean. The first was called the Prince of Preachers—C. H. Spurgeon. He was able to talk and think in pictures. Sentence after sentence creates a little word picture. His sermons are easy to read, and I'm sure, were easy to listen to. The attention is held as the points are made.

Yet there is a greater Preacher by far than Spurgeon who also used word pictures. You'll find summaries of his sermons in a collection of three little books by Matthew, Mark and Luke (Note that John's Gospel contains teaching which is far more conceptual in its form). Read our Lord's teaching and preaching and see how he was the absolute Master of pictorial language, not only in his parables, but in his other sayings as well. It's not that the Lord Jesus in any sense avoided teaching theological concepts; rather is it that his was the Divine genius of communicating the theological concepts in language so lucid that a child, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, could understand (Matt. 11:25).

I suppose included in this plea for pictorial language, rather than conceptual language, must be the plea also for illustrations. You know the rule for illustrations, don't you? An illustration should illustrate. It shouldn't require further elucidation as to what it means. I have heard a preacher having to illustrate his illustration to try and explain what it means. The essence of a good illustration is that it should be like a window that immediately lets light flood in to dispel the darkness.

We have all heard preachers whose sermons were like those high-rise blocks of flats before the builder was finished—huge concrete structures with neither windows nor doors, so that all is pretty dark inside and anyone venturing about the building would be hard put to find

his way around. Build windows into your sermons. Let the light of understanding come streaming in with good, relevant, up to date illustrations.

Ecclesiastes 12:11: 'The Preacher searched to find just the right words...' The AV has: 'acceptable words'. The RSV has: 'pleasing words'. GNB has: 'comforting words'. Another translation is 'words of delight'.

Notice what the rest of the verse says: 'and what he wrote was upright and true'. Listen to Ralph Wardlaw's comment on Ecclesiastes 12:11:

He threw his instructions into various forms, to attract and to fix the attention. He accommodated himself in this respect, as far as was consistent with preserving the inviolate interests of truth, to the diversified tastes of men. He took care to avoid every thing, in his modes of expression, and in the general manner of his instructions, that could tend unnecessarily to irritate, disgust, and repel those whom it was the desire of his heart to make 'wise unto salvation'. He sought to gain their ear, only that he might the more effectually reach their hearts. He used all the sweetness of persuasion, all the solemnity of affectionate warning, and all the faithfulness of kind reproof, to win sinners from the error of their ways, and draw them to God.

### 4. The Application

We must drive the message home. Preaching is never a take it or leave it affair. See what Ecclesiastes 12:12 says: 'The words of the wise are like goads...like firmly embedded nails'. The point has been thrust home to the heart, and has been driven firmly into the mind and soul.

We must apply. We will never effectively apply the Word of God to our people until it has been applied to our own hearts. If the sword is to pierce and divide their thoughts and intentions, it must first have been a sharp two-edged sword that has pierced the preacher. Let me say this: when the Word has pierced and wounded us, to expose the poison

of selfishness, rebellion and perversity in our hearts so that the healing balm of grace may be applied, we will never wield that sword in an unkindly or vindictive manner. Knowing the pain the strokes of the sword will bring, before the healing can take place, we will wield the sword gently, and smite carefully.

I don't think we rant and rave and rage in the pulpit. I don't think so. Not if our own wounds are only just beginning to heal. We will take up the scalpel as would a skilful surgeon. We are not butchers with meat cleavers. Though it is certainly true that at times painful amputations must be made.

Therefore, when we apply the word to our people's hearts, let us be motivated by compassion, love, and mercy, as well as by an abhorrence of sin and rebellion. So let us speak softly, as well as with a holy awe of the majesty of our God. At the end of the day as we stand to preach, we must speak to the heart, we must guide the knife to the cancer, we must draw blood, we must cut deeply, we must wound. Then we must lead to Jesus Christ, and to the fountain for sin and uncleanness where sinners can be washed and redeemed and sanctified.

### 5. Introduction and Conclusion

Is it too silly to say an introduction should introduce, and a conclusion should conclude? I have heard many an introduction and conclusion that did neither. When you've been preaching twenty years in a place, and you have a congregation well taught in the Scriptures, then you may allow yourself the luxury of making your introduction a kind of résumé of last week's exposition. But those of us who land on unsuspecting congregations who haven't the foggiest idea what expository preaching is about should have introductions that are attention grabbing, and make the congregation sit up and listen.

And the Conclusion. When the preacher says, 'Finally...' a congregation visibly brightens in anticipation of him finishing. Don't disappoint them! What can be worse than to raise their hopes by saying 'Finally...' and then ten minutes later to say, as one of my assistants once

did, 'And now I finish with five further points'. That is a kind of mental torture which is not going to attract the congregation back! The Conclusion? Best, I suspect, to have it written out in full. Best to have prayed over it, sweated over it, honed it, revised it, until it says all that needs to be said. And don't say, 'Finally...' until you really mean it!

Five points, then, about sermon writing. Structuring, earthing, pictorial language, application, and beginning and ending.

## STAGE FOUR The One Shepherd

Ecclesiastes 12:11: '...given by one Shepherd'.

We at last reach the final stage of sermon preparation—that of standing back, reading through from beginning to end what has been written, and then asking ourselves whether or not the sermon is as it should be. Please don't miss out this fourth stage. What remains to be done is this: We have to ask ourselves certain questions about what we have written, and we have to ask the Lord certain questions about what we have written.

Question One is this: Does this sermon lead my people to Christ?

I recently heard a most excellent OT sermon. It was a very fine exposition. Do you know what struck me about it? It could have been preached in the Jewish synagogue down the road. It started in the Old Testament, remained in the Old Testament, and finished in the Old Testament. In my Bible, the Old Testament is essentially prospective—pointing forward to Christ. Yet there simply was no Christ in that sermon. Not even a hint of the Saviour or his marvellous grace.

So I always review what I have written and ask myself 'What I am saying of the Lord?' I know we are Trinitarians. But the Father's will and the Spirit's sacred office are both directed to the glory of the crucified and risen Saviour.

The Second Question is this: 'Lord, is there anything in my sermon that you want to remove?'

I lay the sermon before the Chief Shepherd (and the main function of the Shepherd is to feed the flock—pastoring means pasturing, which means feeding the flock; don't confuse the shepherd's work with that of the sheep dog!) and ask him if there is anything I have written that his finger would erase. And as often as not there is. You see, ultimately, our sermons, our preaching of the Word, are given by the One Shepherd, as our text says. We are warned of anything in addition to what he gives. I know that in my own sermons is often material that comes from me and not from Christ—I mean material with thrusts and slashes aimed at the recalcitrant in my congregation, but which are fleshly and written in the wrong spirit. So I offer my sermon to Christ, and I ask him to excise from it what is not of him.

How glad I am that I early learned to do that. He has saved me from saying some terrible things, and from hurting some people in quite the wrong way. I am only an under-shepherd. He is the Chief Shepherd, the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd. Therefore, he must veto what I preach. For the Word we proclaim is but an unfolding of the Written Word which bears witness to the Incarnate Word.

So you'll gather the sermon must be completed by being soaked in prayer. Prayer which repents over our harshness and hardness of hearts as preachers; prayer which acknowledges that without Christ we can do nothing; prayer which calls upon Father, Son and Holy Spirit to do their work of grace, first in the preacher, so that the work of grace may then be done in the people.

From text to sermon. I think by now we have spent at least twelve hours on one sermon. And so it should be. For we stand as ambassadors of Christ, knowing that God will bring every deed into judgment (Eccl. 12:14), including every hidden thing, including our sermons. Yet the amazing, stupendous, incomprehensible fact is that by the foolishness of preaching God has ordained that men and women should both come to living faith and grow in that faith into the very likeness of his well-beloved Son.

# The Biblical Case for STAYING in the Kirk Today

These are the numbers of the men armed for battle who came to David...men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do—two hundred chiefs, with all their relatives under their command (1 Chr. 12:32).

My attention was recently drawn to this verse, in the context of the need for wisdom among believers in these days in which we live. Was there ever greater need in the Church of Jesus Christ for men and women of wisdom who have understanding of the times? We have witnessed over recent weeks death upon awful death in the streets of Ulster. The huge problem of teenage and child crime is epitomised by the recent trial of two eleven year old boys for the horrific mutilation and murder of a toddler. The structure of our society is breaking down at its very roots. Nearly half of marriages end in divorce. When they are not full of cases of murder, rape and child sexual abuse the courts are full of parents squabbling over divorce settlements and child maintenance payments. In the West, what was once known as Christendom

is no more, and the name of Christ is more likely to be heard in reproach than in reverence.

This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Look! Disaster is spreading from nation to nation; a mighty storm is rising from the ends of the earth' (Jer. 25:32). These words make chilling reading for us today when we look around us at the state of the world, and in particular the so-called Christian West. We only need to read the prophetic writings of the Old Testament to realise just how real is the judgement of God on nations who disregard his word, and flaunt his decrees. But how are we to respond to this, today?

### An Understanding of Our Times

I believe that we as evangelicals need to cry to God for an understanding of our times, so that we might play our vital

part in the purposes of Grace he has ordained for us as his Body here on earth, and particularly in Scotland and Ireland. And I believe that such an understanding begins with the need to embrace this solemn word about judgement.

We can lay claim to great blessing and favour from the Lord. We have a Christian heritage going back to within a few centuries of New Testament times. More importantly perhaps we live in a land which has known the mighty work of the Spirit of God, when the preaching of the Reformers was with such power that it touched every part of the life of the nation, inculcating the very fabric of society with the constraints of the moral law of God. The foundations of our great institutions were built on the truths of Scripture. The laws of our land were framed from the justice of God revealed in his Word.

The attitudes of even the most ordinary people were moulded by the Scriptures, for the Word of God was freely read and taught. The historian J. H. Green said of the great moral change that came over England in the post reformation years that 'England became a people of a book, and that book was the Bible'. Its literary and social effects were great, 'but far greater was the effect on the character of the people as a whole.' And that can be said all the more so for Scotland and Ulster, and not only of the days of the Reformation, but right through until the middle years of the nineteenth century, when God in his mercy sent true revival in the land, affecting whole communities and generations of great and humble alike.

We have had an embarrassment of riches from the hand of God in this land of ours. Where has there been more teaching of the Word of God? Where has there been such an abundance of the mighty work of the Spirit in revival? Where has there been such a tradition of church-going and of education in the things of God from the earliest of infancy? Surely God can say of us, 'You have I known'.

#### A Spiritual Famine

But where are we today? What have we to show for our great legacy of Grace? What a sorry state we are in as a nation, a people, and a church. But who have

listened or paid any attention... 'But you did not listen to me,' declares the Lord 'and you have provoked me with what your hands have made, and you have brought harm to yourselves' (Jer. 25:3,7).

'You have brought it upon yourselves' says God. And we in this land have brought it upon ourselves, because of our failure to listen and act upon the Word of the Lord, when it was in plenty. And now we find that the prophecy of Amos has come true for us:

'The days are coming,' declares the Sovereign Lord 'when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it (Amos 8:11f.).

Today we see what were once living churches lying empty and boarded up, or else made into flats or shops, and even night-clubs (this perverse irony is made the more monstrous in our own city [Aberdeen] by the profanity of naming what was once a place of the ministry of the holy Word of God, 'The Ministry of Sin'!). Many churches that remain have empty pews where once they were

worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind (Rom. 1:28). Is this not our land today? I don't think there are any serious thinking Christians who would or could deny it!

#### A Faithful Remnant

This is grim indeed, but I believe firmly that it is a truth that we have to understand and stomach, if we as evangelical believers are to play our true part in the hidden and even mysterious purposes of God for the future of our church, and for our land. For God does not cast off his people forever. Time after time, having chastened them, he drew them back to himself, always having preserved a faithful remnant for himself.

But this same principle holds true into the New Testament and beyond. It remains true today for the Church of Jesus Christ. It is a continuous fact of history that throughout all manner of persecutions and judgements the Church has survived and been restored through the faithful witness of a remnant of believers. We see this principle clearly in the book of Revelation when we read of the devil being cast down to the earth, and persecuting the woman who brought forth the man-child (surely the ancestral line of Christ) and then continuing to vent his rage against her descendants (Rev. 12:17).

We therefore—if we are to play our part effectively as members of this remnant through whom God's Grace is preserved in our Church for its eventual restoration and the salvation of many in our land—must learn how God would have us live and witness in the situation that we find ourselves in—here in ailing, dying churches. Answers to some of these questions are to be found in what we are told of the experiences of God's people throughout the Old Testament, and in particular during times of judgement and chastisement. Let us then turn our attention to some of these examples.

Throughout even the most desperate times in Israel's chequered history God had his people, his remnant set apart for righteousness. He raised up men and women in the Kingdom 'for such a time

## *Are the things some see as compromise, not rather personal sacrifice and humiliation that we simply have to bear.*

we to blame? The word God spoke through Jeremiah to the people of Israel concerning the coming captivity to Babylon could hardly be more relevant to us today:

The word of the Lord has come to me and I have spoken to you again and again, but you have not listened. And though the Lord has sent all his servants the prophets to you again and again, you have not

full, and alas! some have even emptier ministries. The church as a structure in our land, outwardly at least, is reduced to an irrelevance so far as having any influence on the majority of society is concerned.

The state of our nation is a direct consequence of the spiritual impoverishment of the churches. Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint (Pro. 29:18). And, Furthermore, since they did not think it

as this', those who by their influence kept the flame burning at the altar of God when all around was deepest darkness. These must be our examples as we look to our role in our churches in these closing years of the twentieth century and into the next. So what characterised these men and women of God?

### **Solidarity and Identification with their People's Sin**

Firstly, they identified with the sin of their people. They recognised their corporate guilt, and their solidarity under judgement with their people. When they cried to God they said *We... Our sin... Us*; not *Them and Their sin*. (See Dan. 9:4ff. Cf. Neh. 1:5ff.; Jer. 9:1)

The same is true for all the great leaders of God's people through the Old Testament. They were one with their people, standing with them in their sin, but acting as intercessors and mediators towards God.

However, the most perfect example of all is our Saviour Jesus Christ, who though he was the sinless Son of God, firstborn over all creation, he took on the mantle of sinful flesh, becoming 'one of us' to win us salvation (2 Cor. 5:21). At his baptism in the Jordan, a baptism of repentance which he had no need for, he publicly took his place among us, identifying with us in our sin, shame and hopelessness.

And he calls us, as he called his Old Testament saints, to be like him, today, in our churches and land.

### **Humility to live with the Consequences of Sin**

Secondly, they not only identified with their people's sin, they recognised that they were not exempt from the consequences of that sin. For God still blesses his people in spite of sin and waywardness, but within the bounds that they set for themselves. That the consequences of sin live on to haunt the saints is evident right through the history of the people of God. God's chosen ones recognised that there were humiliations in abundance to put up with as a result. This is really the crux of the matter. This is where it hits home, and where we have to put it to work in the nitty gritty of

life.

Think of Israel in the wilderness. Moses and Aaron, and the righteous Joshua and Caleb, who would have entered the land, had to put up with forty years of wandering, and could have rightly resented and grumbled about this. But they had a 'different spirit', and humbly accepted their place with the people.

Or think of Samuel. He had to go and anoint a king for Israel, even though he knew that this represented rebellion of the people against God and would surely bring disaster to the land. Samuel had to watch as his prophecy came true

the temple that signified the presence of God himself, and that they must get on with it and make the best of it! 'Live, build houses, marry and get on with life, and simply accept that you will have to do things that appal you and that go against your precious religion (which was none too precious while you were still in your own land!)'. God's faithful had to stomach this word from the Lord too, and get on with their witness in a godless community. They had no choice!

Have we, as evangelicals in the church today something to learn from this? May we not also have to be humbled, and

## ***The church...is reduced to an irrelevance so far as having any influence on the majority of society is concerned.***

before his eyes. How hard and sore that must have been for him! But God said, 'Let them have their king', and Samuel too had to live with the consequences. Again, think of the captivity to Babylon. God told the people in no uncertain terms that they would have to submit to the Babylonians. Many of the people would not hear of it. 'No. We will never do that! We will fight for our freedom, for our faith!' they said. We read in Jeremiah 27 how false prophets cried out against Jeremiah's warnings, as he went around with a yoke on his neck, symbolising the servitude that was to come upon them. There were those who glibly cried to God for salvation and vindication against this heathen nation that was bearing down on his chosen ones, thinking he would jump to save them! And God's answer to that?

Bow your neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon; serve him and his people, and you will live. (Jer. 27:12).

What a bitter pill that was for the Jews to swallow! God was saying to this people he had called to be separate, holy, and different, that they must go into a pagan land far away from blessed Jerusalem and

'serve the King of Babylon', by accepting things within our church that we recoil against and violently oppose from even the most worthy biblical reasons? Are the things some see as compromise, not rather personal sacrifice and humiliation that we simply have to bear as a fact of life in a church that has brought judgement on itself?

Just as our Lord stood with sinners at his baptism, so he also humbly swallowed the bitter medicine of Roman occupation, and was willing to 'serve Caesar and live', in order to carry out the plan for the salvation of the world, from within. This is the great death / life principle to which we as followers of Jesus are also called (Phil. 2:5; 2 Cor. 4:10).

We tend to think of this only in spiritual terms, but what if part of the death we have to die as believers in our denomination today is to acknowledge our corporate sinfulness and waywardness, and to see the state of the church in terms of what we have brought upon ourselves by that sin, and to 'serve the General Assembly, and live'?

We may baulk at many things in the church which arise from liberal theology. But we too are to blame, and I believe God is calling us to recognise this, live with it, and make the best of it

however difficult we and our consciences may find it. For through this death to self, the life of Jesus may also be revealed in time in the whole church.

### **People of great Faithfulness and Intercession**

We have read the great prayers of Daniel and Nehemiah. What passion they showed as they laid hold on the God of heaven for the sake of their people!

O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name (Dan. 9:19).

Do we pray like this? Do we see ourselves as these men did, placed where they were for the sake of their people? Do we have the passion that they had, that drove them to their knees continually, lifting their whole nation up to God and crying for mercy? Do we see the frustrations we struggle with in our church today as things to spur us on in prayer for the ignorant, untaught people in our land, or do they rather make us long to have done with it, and get out of this wretched so-called apostate denomination?

These great men of God stayed where God put them, and put up with all kinds of hardship, sorrow, frustration and sacrifice, because their hearts were moved with the compassion and love of the covenant God whom they knew and feared and loved. They were not for quitting no matter how bad things got.

### **Sacrificial, prevailing prayer**

I finish with what I think is one of the most moving and wonderful scenes in the whole of the Scriptures. Four times in Numbers chapters 11–16, God's anger burned against the people because of their persistent sin, until he declared he will destroy them utterly. In Numbers 11, the fire of the Lord broke out among them, but Moses prayed to the Lord and the fire died out. Then when Miriam his own sister spoke out against Moses (how hurtful must that have been) and God struck her with leprosy, Moses

again prayed to God and she was healed. When the people refused to go up into the Land, the Lord tells Moses that he will destroy the whole nation and make his descendants into a great people instead. Still Moses fell on his face and cried to God on behalf of his people.

Finally, in Numbers 16 after God had destroyed the tents of Korah who had sought to usurp the priesthood, the people still grumbled against the Lord! And so God commanded Moses and Aaron to separate themselves from the people that he might destroy them utterly. Even then, when God had expressly commanded them to desert the people, they still refused, but fell face down in believing prayer. We have this wonderful picture of Aaron running into the midst of the assembly, and standing in the breach, between the living and the dead to make atonement. And the plague stopped. That is faithfulness, is it not?

Was God testing his servants to see the extent of their faithfulness and their love for the people? This is certainly a mystery that they moved the hand of God thus. But if he was, I am sure that His holy heart was swollen with pride at the stature of Moses. Perhaps not so very different from another time of testing, in a garden at Gethsemane, where another Man was tested, and could have left His people to a far worse and eternal judgement. But he too was faithful. He too took his place in the breach, between the living and the dead, facing the wrath of God head on; and he too stopped the plague, forever.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses... let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (Heb. 12:1ff.).

# The Name

**I**t has struck me in recent years that there is a growing fashion in speaking about the Lord to call him by his earthly name of *Jesus*. One is aware of this tendency particularly among charismatics and liberals. But this kind of practice is contagious, and it is becoming common to hear Christians of all shades of theological opinion referring to the Lord simply as *Jesus*.

We hear it in the pulpit, the Prayer Meeting and also when Christian people are speaking about their spiritual lives. Indeed, I recently heard a congregation being severely taken to task by a missionary just home from Asia: she maintained there was 'power' in the name of *Jesus* and that Christian people of the United Kingdom were not using the name *Jesus* nearly enough. 'Let's have less of the formal *Lord Jesus*', she urged, 'and more of the mighty name *Jesus*, which is above every name...'

But was she right? And is Paul saying in Philippians 2:9ff. that *Jesus* is the *name which is above every name...*? I confess that my own practice over a number of years has been to reduce my use of the name *Jesus*, and to increase my use of the title *Lord Jesus* or *our Lord Jesus Christ*. So, provoked into action by the missionary's outburst, I took up an exhaustive concordance, and offer in Table 1 the fruit of my research.

Some comments on the above table are called for.

First, of the twenty occurrences of *Jesus* in Acts, thirteen are to be found in

**Table 1: Occurrences of the various names for Jesus Christ in Acts to Revelation.**

	Jesus	Jesus Christ	Lord Jesus	Lord J. C.	Christ	Lord	Other
<b>Acts</b>	20	14	13	7	12	79	17
<b>Romans</b>	1	19	4	14	35	24	6
<b>1 &amp; 2 Cor.</b>	8	13	7	19	75	64	2
<b>Gal.—Col.</b>	2	42	4	64	78	34	5
<b>1 &amp; 2 Thess.</b>	2	2	3	36	6	22	1
<b>Pastorals</b>	—	26	4	12	4	18	8
<b>Hebrews</b>	7	4	1	—	9	—	12
<b>James—Jude</b>	—	27	1	13	13	29	6
<b>Revelation</b>	5	6	1	1	4	4	5

Note that under 'Other' are included: *Son of God* (especially in Hebrews), *Lamb*, *King of kings*, *Lord of lords* (in Revelation), *Son of Man*, *Saviour*, etc.

the first eight chapters. Of the remaining seven, two are found on the lips of the Lord himself in passages where the title Lord predominates (9:5=26:15): 'And he said, "Who are you *Lord*?" And the *Lord* said, "I am *Jesus* whom you are persecuting". And he trembling said, "*Lord*, what do you want me to do?"'. Two of the other occurrences refer to the practice of Jewish exorcists and the demon's reply: '*Jesus* I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?' (19:13ff.). Which leaves only three occurrences of the name *Jesus* in Acts chapters 9–28.

One must conclude that as the early church matured theologically, the practice became more established to refer to the Lord by titles or names which implied his finished work and exaltation at the Father's right hand.

Second, the Letter to the Hebrews is also atypical since the purpose of the writer is to demonstrate to his Hebrew readers that the earthly *Jesus* was High Priest of a better Covenant, and therefore to be worshipped as Lord. Indeed, the only use of the title *Lord* comes right at the end of the letter (13:20) when the case for Christ's Lordship has been conclusively set out.

Third, the earthly name *Jesus* (which appears generally to denote the Lord's humanity) is occasionally used right through the New Testament and into the book of Revelation. But at least some instances of its use can be argued as indicating a special intimacy between the Lord and the writer. For example, in 2

Corinthians 4:10ff., Paul four times uses the name *Jesus* in a context of intense suffering he has endured for the sake of the Gospel. The reader is left with a deep sense of the intimate relationship between his blessed Master and the wounded, lonely soldier of the Cross.

Fourth, it is surely undeniable that the almost invariable practice of the early church, reflected in the New Testament writings, is to use names for the Lord which are also titles implying that his work is accomplished and that He is now exalted and glorified. From Romans to Revelation, the earthly name *Jesus* is used twenty-five times compared to well over 1080 titular names (my table above is far from exhaustive) of the Lord.

Fifth, in line with the use the Gospels make of the name *Jesus*, it is clearly proper to use the Lord's earthly name, *Jesus*, when one is making reference to his earthly life and ministry.

In conclusion, the missionary was in

fact quite wrong to assert that *Jesus* is the name above every name; surely it is the title *Lord* before which every knee must bow. Hence the early church's confession, *Jesus is Lord*. While Christian people may well occasionally use the name *Jesus* (perhaps in the deep intimacy of their prayer-lives, as lovers use 'lovenames'), for he is eternally our Brother and the Second Adam, our general practice must surely be to accord to Jesus Christ the honour that is his due by giving him names of his exaltation and glory.

of  
Jesus

# The Trial and Triumph of Faith

First Sermon in a Series of Twenty Seven by Samuel Rutherford on the Syrophoenician Woman published in 1645

## Christ's Work of Grace

This text being with child of free-grace, holds forth to us a miracle of note; and because Christ is in the work, in an eminent manner, and there is here also much of Christ's new creation, and a garden planted and watered by Christ's own hand—that is, a strong faith in a woman under trial—it requireth the bending of our heart to attention:

First, because to any who are seeking Jesus Christ, this text calls, 'Come and see!' These words, in their scope, drive at the awakening of believers in praying (when an answer is not given at first), to a fixed and resolved lying and dying at Christ's door, by continuing in prayer, until the King comes out, opens the door, and answers the desire of the hungry and poor.

Second, for the subject: they contain the history of a rare miracle, wrought by Christ, in casting forth a devil out of the daughter of a woman of Canaan; and for Christ to throw the devil out of a Canaanite, was very like the white banner of Christ's love displayed to the Gentiles, and the King's royal standard

set up to gather in the heathen under his colours.

## The Incident Analysed

The parts of the miracle are as follows:

1. The place where it was wrought (Matthew 15:21).
2. The parties on whom it was wrought—the mother and her possessed daughter: she is described by her nationality.
3. The impulsive cause of the miracle—she hearing, came, and prayed to Jesus for her little daughter, in which there is a dialogue between Christ and the woman, containing,

(a) Christ's testing of her: first, with no answer; second, with a refusal; third, with the reproach of a dog;

(b) the infancy of her faith: first, in crying until the disciples interposed themselves; second, her persisting in adoring [him]; third, praying; fourth, by faith arguing with Christ, that she had some interest in him, even though she was amongst the dogs; yet withhold, as grace has no evil eye, not envying because the Morning Market of Christ and

his High Table, was the Jews' rightful due, as the King's children; so she might be among the dogs, to eat the crumbs under Christ's Table, knowing that the very refuse of Christ is more excellent than ten whole worlds.

4. The miracle itself, wrought by the woman's faith, in which we have:

- (a) Christ's heightening of her faith;
- (b) the granting of her desire;
- (c) the measure of Christ's bounty—as thou wilt ...
- (d) the healing of her daughter.

## Mark and Matthew Harmonised

Mark (7:24f.) says that the woman came to Christ in a house. Whereas Matthew (15:22f.) seems to say that she came to him on the pathway, as these words would suggest: Send her away for she crieth after us.

Augustine thinks that the woman first came to Christ while he was in the house, where he had gone desiring to be hidden, either because he did not (to avoid offending the Jews) openly offer himself to the Gentiles—having forbidden his disciples to go to the Samaritans;

Mark 7:24: And from thence he arose, and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and went into an house, and would that no man should know it; but he could not be hid.

Matthew 15:21f.: Then Jesus went thence, and came into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And behold a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, 'Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David, for my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

Mark 7:25f.: For a certain woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came and fell at his feet (The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation) and she besought him, that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter.

or else because he would have his glory hidden for a time; or even because on purpose he hid himself from the woman, so that her faith might find him out. And then, because he refused to answer the woman in the house, she still followed him in the way and cried after him, as Matthew says.

### The Love of Christ

For Christ's love is:

(a) Liberal. But yet, it must be suited; and though he does not sell his love for the paltry penny-worth of our sweating and pains, yet must we dig deep for such a gold-mine as Christ.

(b) Christ's love is wise. He keeps us knocking, while our desire grows love-sick for him, and he knows that delays raise and heighten the market and the value to us of Christ. We under-rate anything that is at our elbow. Should Christ throw himself into our bosom, or on to our lap, while we are in a morning sleep, he would not then have the flower and marrow of our esteem. It is good that there should be in our experience some fire meeting with water, until we seek

after Christ.

(c) His love must, not only lead the heart, but also draw. Strong desire in one who is in love is most compelling, and delays in enjoying so lovely a thing as Christ breed strong desire in our affections. Suspension of the presence of the one loved oils the wheels of love, desire and joy. Thus, want of Christ is a wing to the soul.

### Undeserved Favour

Interpreters ask what woman she was. Matthew says: a Canaanite, not of any gracious blood; a Syrophenician, for Syrophenicia was in the border between Palestine and Syria; and it was at this time inhabited by the remnants of the Canaanites; a Greek, not by birth but because of the Greek language and customs brought there by Alexander, and the succeeding kings of Syria.

All the Gentiles go under the name of Greeks in scripture language, as in Romans 1:14, Galatians 3:28, 1 Corinthians 1:22 & 24; not because they are all Greeks by nation and blood, but because conquest, language and customs

in scriptural language stand for blood and birth. However, it stands as no blemish in Christ's Accounting Book who your father was, whether an Ammonite or Hittite. So you come to him, and he does not ask whose you are, for you belong to him; nor who your father is, for you will be his brother and of his household.

### The Wonder of Providence

Mark 7:24: And from thence he arose and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon.

Christ wearied of Judea and had been grieved in spirit with the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, and the provocation of that stiff-necked people. He was chased away to the profane pagans. The hardening of the Jews makes way to Christ's first young love laid upon the Gentiles. Christ does but draw back only a little the curtain of separation, to look through to one believing heathen. The King opens one little window, and holds out his face in one glimpse to the woman of Canaan. Thus Christ's works of deep providence are free mercy interwoven

with pure justice, making one web. He departs from the Jews and sets his heart and face on the Gentiles.

Consider the wonder of providence here:

(a) The devil sometimes shapes, but our wife, the Lord, sews! Babylon kills, but God makes alive. So sin, hell and death are made into a chariot to carry along the Lord's excellent work.

(b) The providence of God has two sides, one black and sad, the other white and joyful. While heresy takes its strength and greenness from the sun, God's blessing on necessary and seasonable truths is the fair side of that same providence. Adam's first sin was through the devil and hell digging a hole through the comely and beautiful frame of the creation of God; and that is the dark side of providence. But the 'Flower of Life' springing up to take away sin, and to paint for men and angels the glory of a heaven and new world of free-grace, that is the lightsome side of providence. Christ scourged, Christ bound [to the Cross] so that he cannot command even a cup of water, Christ dying, shamed, forsaken, is black. But Christ in that same work, redeeming the captives of hell, opening forfeited paradise to sinners, that is fair and white.

Or again, Joseph weeping in prison for no fault of his is foul and sad; but Joseph brought out to reign, next in power only to the King, to keep alive the Church of God in great famine, is

joyful and glorious. Or again, the apostles whipped, imprisoned, killed all the day long, are sad and heavy; but interwoven with this is that God causes them always to triumph and to sow the savour of the knowledge of Christ. Yet again, Paul riding upon his iron chains, yet exalting Christ in the Gospel through the court of the blood-thirsty Nero, makes up a fair and comely contexture of divine providence.

(c) God in all his works in our day when he rains from heaven a sad shower of blood on the three kingdoms, still has his foot on justice that wrath may fill to the brim the cup of malignants and prelates, and has his other foot on mercy to wash away the filth of the daughter of Zion, and to purge the blood of Jerusalem in the midst thereof, by the spirit of judgement and by the spirit of burning. And this is God's method and ordinary pathway (Psalm 25:10), for in one and the same action, God can walk both to the east and to the west, to the north and to the south.

### Understanding God's Ways

Learn therefore: It is our own fault that we look upon God's ways and works by halves and pieces, and so often see nothing except the black side and that dark part of the moon. We make a serious mistake when we look upon men's work only half finished, for example, a house being built lying in a hundred pieces, here timber, here a rafter, there a spar,

there a stone, in another place half a window and in another place the side of a door. There is no beauty, no appearance of a house here! Have patience a little, and see them all by skill compacted together in proper order, and then you'll see a fair building. Likewise, when a painter draws only half a portrait—just one side of the head, one eye, the left arm, shoulder and leg, and has not drawn the other side, nor even filled in with colours all the members, parts and limbs in their full proportion, it's not like a man.

So do we look on God's works, by halves and parts, and we see him bleeding his people, scattering parliaments, chasing away nobles and prelates, as not willing they should have a finger in laying one stone of his House! Yet do we not see that in this dispensation, the other half of God's work makes it a fair piece? God is washing away the blood and filth of his church, removing from the work those who will oppose it.

In bloody wars, we see evil soldiers wasting, spoiling and killing with atrocious actions; yet are they but instruments of God for purging Zion's base metals, tin, brass and lead, and similar reprobate metal as themselves. For you see, Jesuits and false teachers are but God's candle snuffers, to occasion the clearing and the snuffing of the lamps of the tabernacle, thus unmasking the truth and making it more obvious.

## Prayer

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# The Church Prayer Meeting

People who hear of our teaching ministry through the distribution of the monthly Congregational Record with its daily Bible reading notes, and later by the distribution of tapes, booklets of sermons, *etc.*, still seem to be most impressed by the Saturday evening prayer meeting when they visit us.

Folk have come not only from England, Ireland and Europe, but also the USA, Australia and New Zealand to be with us on Saturday evenings. In expressing their appreciation of fellowship it is almost inevitably the prayer meeting which strikes them as most remarkable.

At the same time, many who have heard of our Bible teaching ministry and have come along on Sundays have apparently no interest whatsoever in the gathering for prayer on Saturday evenings. This shocks us, because if people have gone away without knowing what has energised the ministry that has blessed them, they have missed the point of it all. For the powerhouse of our entire ministry is our battles and wrestlings in prayer which have continued every Saturday without break, summer or winter, for more than four decades.

### Prayer in which we wrestle

Of course, such prayer is the hardest thing in the world. I am often more exhausted on Saturday evenings after

between two and three hours of wrestling prayer than I am after two long services on Sunday with hours spent in fellowship and counselling afterwards. This is hardly surprising, since the kind of prayer which takes the world as its parish, along with the burden and cares of many works of God at home and abroad, requires the utmost spiritual energy. It is remarkable that out of a congregation of a few hundreds, for the numbers vary considerably with many comings and goings, only a fraction dare enter the prayer room. I say 'dare' because many devoted servants of the Lord, even those who have been on missionary service for years and those who are or have been active in the Lord's service, avoid the prayer room in which they themselves had been prayed for in the past! Some have occasionally attended our prayer meeting, but with its length, intensity and range of intercession find it far more than they bargained for. I am often amazed and deeply hurt that such people blandly opt out of the arduous

work of the powerhouse and retire to a more comfortable seat in the congregation and the normal services of the church.

### Intercessory Prayer

Many folk who have visited us throughout the years, particularly from the United States, have said that the one thing that is hardest to find in churches in that vast land is solid sessions of intercessory prayer. Some of these dear friends who have studied in Aberdeen and worshipped with us have returned to their own land to plant churches or build up others which have lost out through the multiplicity of events going on in them—'programmes', they call them! They have said it is the hardest thing in the world to get people to come to pray. Apparently many who profess to love and serve the Lord Jesus fail to see the connection between the hidden work of intercessory prayer and what happens before their eyes in the conversion of souls and their upbuilding in the faith. What a blind spot! And what a work of the Enemy to deceive so many Christians all over the world as to the value of the powerhouse of prayer!

Naturally, over so many years our Saturday evening meeting has changed somewhat in form. More and more time had to be taken up sharing news from far and near, and eventually this took so long that we decided to print a leaflet

with summaries of the news. Copies are distributed to those attending, and many come to the meeting early to 'do their homework'. This has proved a boon because it gives us up to half an hour more for intercession.

### Worshipful Prayer

However, there was a time when the emphasis on intercession was so predominant that we were in danger of reeling off 'shopping lists' of people's names and Christian causes all over the world. We became particularly aware of this at one of our various times of challenge regarding the depth of our devotion to the Lord. So we decided to spend more time in prayer as worship, since listing names and needs for prayer can become objective and even cold, without much more than a 'respectful nod' to the Lord himself. If biblical prayers teach us anything, it is that they almost always commence with worship. Since the prayer meeting had gone on for at least twenty-five years without any singing at all, we decided to start the meeting by singing a Psalm in metrical form and then briefly expound it after prayer. Then followed a time of worshipful prayer when there was an implicit understanding that no intercession would take place, but rather thanksgiving to God for his Word together with adoration and worship. This has done more to deepen the Christian lives of our people than anything else. After some time of worshipful prayer, the summaries of news are looked over, items added and members of the fellowship share particular needs especially urgent ones, along with news of who would be preaching where on the Lord's day. The rest of the meeting continues with intercession for an hour and a half. This is a long meeting by modern standards in our country, commencing at 7pm and going on till at least 9.30pm. So a number have to leave at various times for particular reasons. But on the whole people do this quietly and unobtrusively.

In addition to the printed list of news we receive many church magazines from churches associated with us at home and abroad, as well as missionary magazines. Nearly all of these (many scores, per-

haps a hundred or two) are taken to the prayer meeting after perusal and offered to the fellowship as further fuel for prayer.

There are certain unwritten 'rules' as to the order of praying, especially at intercession. The Minister starts off, followed generally by the Session Clerk (our principal lay office-bearer), after which the elders are expected to take part, then the rest, including women and children. This order is not strictly adhered to, especially because of visitors attending the meeting.

Some pray for only one need, others with more knowledge and fluency may take an area of the land, or the world, or a group of churches or mission stations, and briefly but comprehensively cover the known needs there. Some will take up the world situation, since our people are encouraged to follow the news on the media, and there and then turn the immediate and exigent needs to spontaneous prayer: that burden is then brought to the meeting.

One or another will seek to cover our own congregational needs, although the needs of others are often so multifarious and clamant that we may often almost forget to pray for ourselves (but we know that others are doing that). Others will cover the ministries in Scotland, the other countries of the United Kingdom, Europe, from Spain to Finland, into eastern Europe, Asia and the Far East, India, Australasia, and the Islands of the Pacific, Africa from north to south and east to west, the Americas, south, central and north, with particular burdens for the trouble spots of the world, especially the Middle East. We also have a great burden for those suffering for their faith in Soviet or other prison camps, including hostages.

The flow of prayer generally continues until 9.30pm, but it is not always possible to end then; so if any area of the world or particular group of needs has been omitted, the minister will try to cover these in his closing prayer.

### The High Priesthood of Christ

If it be asked what doctrine of prayer governs our intercession, we might answer that the high priesthood of Christ

is much in mind. We seek to be theological in our prayers addressing the Father through the Son by the Holy Spirit, and beseeching the Almighty for those things we believe to be in the divine will, leaving them there.

### Hoping Prayer

There are at least two levels of asking. There is the level of desiring or 'hoping' prayer, when the will of God may not be known, but our highest desire is expressed, say, in respect of someone desperately ill whom the Lord may wish to take, or recover. In such cases we make the request, summoning all the faith we have, but leaving the issue reverently and caringly with the Lord.

### Trusting Prayer

On another level there is that entrance into the known will of God which is able to believe with serene assurance that certain requests are within the purposive will of God, and not only will be granted, but have been granted. In these instances we seek to claim with full assurance. This is a level of intercession which we believe can only be entered into by an experience of the death/resurrection of our Lord, desiring only God's will. The assurance may then be given that such and such will be done. Jesus says that if we believe that a mountain will be removed and cast into the depths of the sea, it will be done. It is of course other than physical mountains that our Lord had in mind, and when by seeking we attain that level of claiming faith, we ought to be able to thank the Lord for granting what we believe is his will.

Indeed this is the level of faith to which we invite parents to aspire in claiming their children for the Lord. The ground of the rite of infant baptism is God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17:10, applied to New Testament baptism and confirmed in Acts 2:39, 'The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call'. When children are brought to the font, parents, Minister and believing congregation are encouraged to seek the assurance at which the symbol of water truly represents the washing away of the

infant's sins, and its new birth. Such a level of claiming prayer is not reached automatically, for we cannot assume that every child will prove to be the Lord's (compare the case of Esau over Jacob). The quality of believing prayer called for is that which comes to grips with a vital personal experience of the death/resurrection of our Lord in which the will is so blended with his by dying to sin and self that we are able to take hold of God's promise and ask for it confidently to be fulfilled.

Such a level of prayer may in general lead to battles and wrestlings which engage the heavenly powers of good and evil, on the basis of Daniel chapter 10, the warfare passage in Ephesians 6:10-18, or Revelation 12:10,11, etc. We believe that seemingly intractable situations, including world affairs, are susceptible to the prayers of the saints, appealing to the Father through his reigning Son. We have no doubt that God in heaven hears us when we make intercession for the particular trouble spots of the world, the Middle-East, Central America, the Far East, and Christian prisoners in gaols and psychiatric institutions. Indeed, when we recollect that along with the saints of the world, we made continual prayer for China from 1949 when Christian missionaries were expelled, it affords us now some satisfaction and stirs our gratitude to God that he heard the prayers of those many years. It is a fact that the church in China not only survived, but grew hiddenly during times of persecution, until a great hunger for the Word of God seized areas of China's vast territory, and thousands and millions have since crowded to Christ, and long for copies of the Bible.

It is certainly our experience in Scotland that powerhouses of prayer have seen the proliferation of hundreds of conservative evangelical ministries in Presbyterian Scotland and beyond these last few decades.

### Special Prayer

Occasionally, to cope with some intractable evil, a group of elders may gather for special prayer, either in the presence of, or apart from the afflicted one. Hours

may be spent in prayer wrestling for deliverance of the sufferer. This may occur in cases of obdurate illness, when we believe it is the Lord's will to heal. We have thus known of demons being cast out, and dying infants spared to grow to adulthood. We also believe that along with other saints far and wide we may have had some small part in the confusing and confounding of pagan rites taking place in West Africa, when young lives were being sacrificed to vile practices.

As I mentioned before but should re-emphasise here, I'm always astonished that people from all over the world who come to visit us express surprise at the nature of the prayer meeting. From time to time a number of Ministers and divinity students from Ulster and elsewhere come to spend a weekend with us; again, it is always the prayer fellowship that they remark on and to which they return again and again.

Why should such an occasion be so remarkable and regarded as so unusual? I keep asking our friends beyond Scotland, especially in America, why it is that they come from Virginia, Carolina, California, Washington State, Georgia, Florida, Texas and other States just to savour our prayer meeting. Shouldn't this be the norm in Christian work anywhere in the world.

Thus our work goes on unabated, whether the preacher happens to be the pastor or someone else. The Lord is always there, whoever is present or absent, and that makes every occasion a new and relevant experience; for when the Lord is present in the fulness and liberty of his power, nothing can be dull. He keeps us happily on our toes, and yet, devoting ourselves increasingly to him in a spirit of thanksgiving and worship. There is a restful and a healing peacefulness in such worship which is full of health and strength and enables us to sustain a longish prayer meeting at the end of which we may be both exhausted and refreshed.

*(By Rev. William Still. Adapted from a chapter in 'Ten Praying Churches' (Donald English ed., March 1989) and used by permission)*

# Christian Theology, New Agers,

**T**en years ago, hardly anyone in Britain had heard of it. Today, most people are at least familiar with the term 'New Age', even if they have little idea what it means.<sup>1</sup>

Most high street bookstores have substantial New Age sections, while specialist shops abound, offering goods whose purpose could loosely be described as 'spiritual'. The 'New Age' label is used to advertise consumer products ranging from beauty care and fashions to music and alternative health. Nor is the influence of New Age thinking restricted to the popular culture of marketing and television, for there is no shortage of evidence of New Age influence and insights being brought to bear on many academic disciplines. The ranks of New Age writers include scientists,<sup>2</sup> as well as social scientists and business professors—while the emergence of transpersonal psychology as a major 'fourth force' in that discipline is, according to most of its practitioners, an integral part of the New Age movement.<sup>3</sup> Even major UK public institutions have on occasion been known to promote the New Age quite overtly.<sup>4</sup>

## Defining the New Age

What exactly is the New Age? And why

does it matter? These may seem the most obvious questions to ask—and in that order. But finding satisfactory answers is not so easy. Indeed, there is no one simple answer that will explain everything that is encompassed by the New Age phenomenon. Some argue there is no such thing as the New Age and see it as an artificial construct of paranoid Christian fundamentalists, who with the collapse of Communism no longer had anything to hate, and therefore needed to create a mythical enemy for themselves.<sup>5</sup> Even those who happily bear the 'New Age' label sometimes seem unable to define it. Social psychologist John L. Simmons admits that 'I knew something was stirring in the world but I didn't know what', and then proceeds to make grandiose claims that 'the signs of the new movement are everywhere...millions of people are, in one way or another, becoming unofficially involved in it'—and its findings 'may currently be the most vital information in the world, with incredible implications for every man, woman, and child alive today'.<sup>6</sup> Just to compound the

confusion, some who once took pride in wearing the New Age label now wish to discard it, because of what they regard as its misuse by corporations more interested in money than spirituality.<sup>7</sup>

One obvious way to try and identify the New Age is to look for empirical signs of its presence in our culture, but this too can be a misleading approach, for a mind-blowing diversity of spiritual artefacts and techniques all find shelter under this banner. Electronic gadgets claiming to make you a new person rub shoulders with personal colour analysis, aromatherapy, yoga, homeopathy, wilderness retreats, 'bodywork' and massage. Therapists offer self-understanding through a variety of psychological techniques to assist their clients to get in touch with their inner selves, while yet others advertise introductions to personal 'spirit guides', and offer to channel life-changing messages from whales, dolphins, extra-terrestrials, and even (in one advert I came across) from Barbie dolls (described in the ad as 'the polyethylene essence who is 700 million teaching entities').<sup>8</sup>

It is a major challenge even to describe and document something as diverse and multi-faceted as this, let alone to analyse it in any systematic way. Indeed, analytical and logical approaches to knowledge are often deliberately es-

# & the Spiritual Search of Western Culture

chewed by New Agers. In terms of conventional western concepts, the best we can do in trying to categorise the New Age would be to invoke something like Wittgenstein's notion of 'family resemblances'.<sup>9</sup> Or, to put it in a different way, anyone trying to define the New Age is faced with the same problem as the three blind men who tried to describe an elephant. One, starting from the animal's legs, described it as a tree; another, grasping its trunk, assumed it must be a hose; while the third, taking hold of its tail, insisted that an elephant was like a rope. They were all correct, of course, but what was true of the parts was not necessarily true of the whole. The New Age is the same. A typical New Age music catalogue might contain, on the one hand, Gregorian chants and the music of Graham Kendrick, and on the other, recordings which have allegedly been channelled in by their composers and performers from some other spiritual world, so that the listener will automatically be propelled into altered states of consciousness as it is played. The only thing all these have in common is that someone put them in the same catalogue and called them 'New Age'! But the self-understanding either of monks singing medieval chants or of Christians playing Kendrick worship songs would clearly not include the New Age philosophy!

In trying to understand the New Age, we need to live with this kind of unclarity, and focus instead on a rather different set of questions. In the light of our answers to them, however, it may be possible to come back to the empirical evidence of the New Age with a more profound understanding of what is happening and why.

### Putting the New Age in Context

Many people find their first reaction to the New Age is one of amazement and disbelief. How and why can all this possibly be happening now—at the end of the twentieth century and in a culture ostensibly dominated by a rationalist-materialist-reductionist worldview and the products of scientific technology? Lawrence Osborn claims that 'New Age ideas and activities are now virtually co-extensive with western culture'.<sup>10</sup> But surely the last thing anyone could have predicted for the end of the twentieth century would be a return to superstition, mythology and spirituality on this scale? What is going on?

The simple answer is that we are witnessing the end of a civilisation. Or, to use a different term much favoured in the New Age, our culture is undergoing a paradigm shift. We are at a *kairos* moment in history, and what is happening today will in due course prove to be

as significant as the discovery by Copernicus that the solar system was not geocentric but heliocentric, or Newton's articulation of laws of nature, or Einstein's promulgation of the theory of relativity. A growing consensus of opinion believes that the culture and worldview that had its origins in the European Enlightenment—and beyond that, of course, in the Reformation—is now in a state of terminal collapse—and while the new paradigm is in the process of formation, its exact form cannot as yet be determined.

There are many complex factors involved in understanding why this has come about. They go well beyond the narrow concerns of theological enquiry, to embrace science in all its forms, as well as politics and financial disciplines. But three things have provided a significant impetus to the development of the specifically religious and spiritual dimensions of the New Age.

First is the influence of astrology. Astrologically speaking, we are now living in the age of Pisces—the fish—and this age has lasted for approximately the last 2000 years. The age of Pisces therefore roughly corresponds with the Christian era. But that is all changing, and sometime between now and 2063 (exact predictions vary) the age of Pisces will give way to the age of Aquarius (the

water bearer). This will be accompanied by many changes in the world, including (though not restricted to) changes in human potential: another stage in evolution. In the words of Marilyn Ferguson, 'The paradigm of the Aquarian conspiracy sees humankind embedded in nature. It promotes the autonomous individual in a decentralised society. It sees us as stewards of our resources, inner and outer. It says that we are not victims, not pawns, not limited by conditions and conditioning'.<sup>11</sup> According to some, the arrival of the Aquarian age will bring not only cultural and spiritual changes but even physical changes in the way the earth relates to the rest of the solar system.<sup>12</sup> In describing this scenario, astrologers (like their Christian counterparts!) often insist that though the New Age is not yet here in its fullness, nevertheless its impending arrival is certain, and so those who are spiritually aware will tune in to its values here and now. Most of the therapies popularly identified with the New Age are supposed to provide ways of doing this, usually by inducing in their practitioners altered or new dimensional levels of consciousness.

Second, and not unrelated to this, is the obvious consideration that the year 2000 will shortly be upon us. Just as the year 1000 produced a crop of millennial sects, so the same phenomenon is set to appear in the closing years of this century. Even those not attracted by the esoteric dimensions of astrology can still share the expectation that the dawn of a new millennium will give the human race the chance for a new start, and the hope that the new century will not only provide the opportunity for past mistakes to be forgotten, but will itself be a catalyst for change.

In addition, however, there is a deeper and more widespread dissatisfaction with the existing western culture and worldview. A typical New Age understanding of the present state of western culture runs as follows. The Enlightenment, together with the science and technology generated by it, has failed. Not absolutely, of course, for no-one would wish to turn the clock back to a pre-scientific age. Like many others,

New Agers have a love-hate relationship with modern culture. On the one hand, it has led to enormous advances in, for example, transportation systems and medical science. On the other, and at a more profound level, it hasn't worked. The golden coin of modern progress has a heavily tarnished flip side. The old mechanistic models of understanding human life frequently seem to have created more problems than they have solved. In conjunction with a reductionist approach to knowledge, a rationalist-materialist outlook has created discontinuities in every area of life, from the depersonalisation experienced by patients within modern scientific medicine, to the pollution of the environment. Things are getting worse, not better. The great promise of Enlightenment philosophy and science was that it would enable people to control the environment, rather than the environment controlling them. But today's environmental crisis has unleashed forces that no amount of human reason will be able to control, and for the first time since the middle ages people's ultimate future destiny seems to be in the control of unknown, and probably unknowable, natural forces. Within this frame of reference, there is an inevitability to the conclusion reached by physicist Fritjof Capra, who links these matters to new

the difficulty of finding easy answers to many of the questions we may have about it. Ernst Gellner's perceptive study of post-modernism sums up the feelings of many who are struggling to interpret the present intellectual climate: 'Postmodernism is a contemporary movement. It is strong and fashionable. Over and above this, it is not altogether clear what the devil it is. In fact, clarity is not conspicuous amongst its marked attributes'.<sup>14</sup>

### New Age Spirituality

In terms of the relationship between New Age and Christianity, however, things are perfectly clear. The ills of the present are blamed on a loss of direction by previous generations. Inspired by a rationalist-materialist-reductionist worldview, our forebears lost sight of some important dimensions of the human situation. Spiritual and personal values were ignored, and even denied, in favour of a mechanistic viewpoint. If, then, a loss of spiritual perception was a key cause of the problem, the recovery of spirituality will be crucial for any effective resolution of our present plight. On the face of it, this might sound like good news for the church. From one angle, it is, for at least it puts spirituality firmly on the public agenda. But it has a powerful sting in the tail, and Christians

## *We are witnessing the end of a civilisation.*

insights within his own discipline: 'The new concepts in physics have brought about a profound change in our world view; from the mechanistic conception of Descartes and Newton to a holistic or ecological view, a view which I have found to be similar to the views of mystics of all ages and traditions'.<sup>15</sup>

The New Age, then, is both a response to and an expression of the forces of modernity that have dominated western culture since the Enlightenment—and its way of handling the crisis in modernity is a near-perfect example of post-modernism, translated into the religious sphere. This should alert us to

who wish to engage in serious dialogue with the New Age will first have to face some potentially unpalatable facts about themselves.

A basic New Age assumption is that, if there is a way out of the mess, then traditional western sources of spiritual guidance will be of no help in finding it. To put it simply, the Christian church is a part of the old cultural establishment that actually created the present predicament. Consequently, it is so tainted by inadequate and unsatisfactory metaphysical understandings that it is incapable of exercising any constructive role in charting a new course for the

future. Most New Agers have no difficulty in drawing a straight line from the Enlightenment to the church, and when one part of the philosophical edifice of western culture begins to crumble, that inevitably places major question marks against all its other central components.

It can be debated whether Christian values shaped the Enlightenment, or whether it was the other way round, and the church allowed itself to be taken over by essentially secular values.<sup>15</sup> Either way, the practical outcome is the same: if Christianity is part of the problem it cannot also be part of the solution. Consequently, the only place to find useful spiritual guidance will be in other cultures and worldviews, or within ourselves—and both of these play a significant part in New Age spirituality.

Some find themselves attracted to major non-Christian world religions, generally Asian religions, especially Buddhism—though mystical Islam (Sufism) might also be an attractive option. Others find spiritual direction in the rediscovery and acceptance of ethnic cultures that were displaced by European invasions of the Americas, Australasia, or Africa—all of whose people seem to have been able to live at peace with themselves and their environment in a way that westerners have been unable to do. Native American spirituality is currently the focus of enormous interest and New Age sections of bookstores are bulging with books on this theme. This particular route to a new worldview has the added advantage of facilitating the expiation of some of the west's corporate guilt about its past treatment of these cultures, and in the USA today's spiritual seekers can often be found reconstructing the medicine wheels and other spiritual artefacts which their grandfathers took such delight in destroying only a century ago.

Others again seek spiritual solutions in what is effectively a reversal of history, by jumping backwards over the Christian period into the pagan past of Europe itself, to embrace and affirm the long-lost values and worldviews of our own ancestors. In Scotland, Celtic mythology is enjoying a revival for this very reason, and in the process occult and ani-

mistic worldviews have gained new popularity and acceptance. Yet other people—still suspicious of getting involved with anything that might be labelled 'religion'—prefer to find new understandings by exploring the depths of their own psyche, encouraged by the apparent similarities between the tech-

the environment, for instance, where an unthinking acceptance of the absolute distinction between people and the world of nature gave permission for destruction and pollution with no concern for the consequences. Or the history of international conflict, and the assumption that confrontation is the way to

## *The golden coin of modern progress has a heavily tarnished flip side.*

niques of transpersonal psychology and the experiences of mystics through the ages.

Some have suggested that the New Age has come about as eastern religions have travelled to the west, but there is only a limited element of truth in this. Gordon Melton correctly observes that 'Western society has periodically experienced widespread religious hunger accompanied by denunciations of the Church as dead, formal, and spiritually bankrupt. However, for the first time in many centuries, that spiritual hunger coincided with the presence of a number of Eastern religious teachers and a new wave of sophisticated mystical-occult teachers, many with a strong Eastern flavour to their teaching, prepared to feed the general public.'<sup>16</sup> This is not however the most significant factor in the rise of the New Age.<sup>17</sup> The real driving force behind it is dissatisfaction with the cultural status quo of the west, and insofar as western culture has—empirically at least—been Christian culture, dissatisfaction with Christianity is inevitably a significant element.

### **New Age and Christianity**

Many New Agers are simply indifferent to Christianity. Others, however, are virulently opposed to it and see no possibility of cultural or spiritual progress unless the Christian worldview is comprehensively abandoned.<sup>18</sup>

The New Age mistrust of Christianity centres around the notion of dualism. Beginning from an inductive empirical appraisal of the current crisis, it is not hard to see how dualism should have become the *bête noire* of the New Age. Take

resolve differences between peoples. Or the abuse and exploitation of women by men. Or the assumption that analytical, logical reason is of greater value than intuition and creativity. Dualisms of this sort can be found in many areas of life and form the basis of Capra's argument that 'This emphasis, supported by the patriarchal system and further encouraged by the dominance of sensate culture during the past three centuries, has led to a profound cultural imbalance which lies at the very root of our current crisis...'<sup>19</sup> Nor in the light of the history of Christian theology is it difficult to appreciate why the New Age cannot conceive of Christianity having anything useful to contribute to the construction of a holistic paradigm. It is no surprise that the New Age finds a monistic worldview—defined in a variety of ways and culled from a variety of sources—far more relevant to the salvation of our culture than a Christianity which for most of its history has been dominated by dualism in its most extreme form, as originally expounded within Platonism and embraced with enthusiasm by most generations of Christian believers ever since.<sup>20</sup>

### **Christians and the New Age**

We have barely scratched the surface here, but hopefully enough has been said to indicate that the New Age will not go away, and Christians will need to pay considerable attention to all this as a matter of some urgency. Apart from the significant theological questions raised by the New Age, it is a simple fact that those most attracted to it are, in socio-logical terms, those who in the past

formed the natural constituency of the churches.<sup>21</sup> Christian interaction with the New Age is therefore not merely a matter of theoretical apologetics: it is absolutely crucial to any talk of effective mission and evangelism.

Any checklist of priorities for the church is bound to be subjective. The

to insights from the social sciences.<sup>22</sup>

3. The mystical/supernatural/numinous/spiritual dimensions of Christian faith require honest appraisal. The acceptance of some kind of spiritual reality that lies beyond ourselves is more important than the precise terms in which this is described. This whole

## ***Christians who wish to engage in serious dialogue with the New Age will first have to face some potentially unpalatable facts about themselves.***

following is certainly not exhaustive, but may hopefully help to focus on some key issues.

1. Christians will have to live with their heritage and history. Sometimes the record needs to be put straight: Christians have not single-handedly been responsible for everything that has gone wrong in the world, as some New Agers are inclined to claim. On the other hand, Christians have done plenty for which they bear corporate guilt, and repentance will be the most appropriate response. Rewriting history will not work, nor is it convincing to claim that Christians did certain things because they lost sight of their Biblical roots. That may in some cases be true, but to New Agers it just sounds like special pleading and self-justification.

2. As a matter of urgency, we must give attention to the question of dualism, especially as it relates to Christian understandings of sin and blessing, and the nature of God. Many people today (and not only New Agers) experience the church as an institution which puts them down and refuses to accept them as they are. Have Christians sometimes emphasised the wrong kind of dualisms, using concepts of sin for example to justify themselves and condemn others? And what is an authentically Christian view of both divine and human creativity *vis-à-vis* fallenness? These and other related questions need to be answered not just internally by reference to the Christian tradition, but also in relation

area of direct personal perception of the divine is of central importance not only to those who call themselves New Agers but to a rapidly-growing proportion of the entire population. Most New Agers have the impression that most Christians are thoroughgoing rationalist-materialists, and for that very reason have no right to be heard in the contemporary debates on spirituality. This is a particular challenge to those in the Reformed tradition, who historically have most easily worn the rationalist label.

4. Most New Agers find themselves attracted to Jesus, and an alarming number of them have slipped into the New Age by default, because they found the church did not address—let alone meet—their spiritual needs. New Ager David Vaughn identified the problem as long ago as 1967: ‘...this widespread spiritual hunger is symptomatic not of a healthy, virile Church, but of conditions of famine accompanying volcanic eruptions and earthquakes in the ecclesiastical domain’.<sup>23</sup> A couple of other quotations highlight the nature of the problem very precisely. Jacob Needleman describes Christianity as ‘only a matter of words, exhortations and philosophy rather than a matter of practical guidance for experiencing directly the truth of the teachings’.<sup>24</sup> Ian Wray believes Christianity only cares about ‘dwelling intellectually upon the dogma, with a consequent lack of therapeutic, by which I mean the lack of any real body of ideas and practices to help people

change. The near total absence of practical aids to human psychological and spiritual growth within Christianity left a vacuum which [New Age therapies] had to fill, based upon principles which [they] had to discover for themselves’.<sup>25</sup>

Needleman goes on to say that his spiritual search is for ‘the Christianity that works, that actually produces real change in human nature, real transformation’.<sup>26</sup> Presumably Christians are looking for the same thing! This is one of several reasons why I prefer to see the New Age as an opportunity for the church, rather than a threat. Those who are willing for serious engagement with these questions, might yet be surprised to discover that there could be less distance than they think between the New Age and authentic Christianity.

### **Notes**

1 For a more extensive description and analysis of the New Age, see my *What is the New Age Saying to the Church?* (London: HarperCollins 1991). Since writing that, I no longer refer to the New Age as a ‘movement’. It never was a movement in the sense of there being something which one could formally join, but neither is it now a movement in the sense of being some kind of minority pressure group. On the contrary, what we now call the New Age has every appearance of becoming the mainstream western culture of the next century.

2 Fritjof Capra, an internationally-renowned professor of physics in the University of California at Berkeley is perhaps the most well-known, and author of the New Age classic *The Turning Point* (London: Flamingo, 1983). Others in the same category would be Cambridge biologist Rupert Sheldrake, *The Rebirth of Nature: the Greening of Science and of God* (London: Century, 1990), and James Lovelock, author of the classic *Gaia: A New Look at life on Earth* (Oxford: OUP, 1979). Lovelock is ambivalent about his personal commitment to the New Age philosophy, but his work has undoubtedly inspired much New Age thinking. Marilyn Ferguson, a psychology professor, has written the influential volume *The Aquarian Conspiracy* (Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, 1980). For others, see William Bloom, *The New Age: an anthology of essential writings* (London: Rider,

1991). The annual Festival of Body, Mind and Spirit, held in London each spring, has a seminar programme which is regularly addressed by people who are not only leading New Agers, but in significant positions within the British Establishment—people like Sir George Trevelyan, the so-called 'father' of the British New Age, who was headmaster of Gordonstoun during Prince Charles' education there. The fact that many decision-makers, both here and in the USA, are committed New Agers gives it significantly more influence than might be inferred from the actual number of New Agers in the community at large.

3 For an accessible account of the emergence of transpersonal psychology and its connexions with the contemporary spiritual search, see R. S. Valle, 'The Emergence of Transpersonal Psychology', in R. S. Valle & S. Halling (eds), *Existential-Phenomenological Perspectives in Psychology* (New York: Plenum Press, 1989), pp. 257–268.

4 For an example of such formal promotion of New Age values, see *TSBeat* issue 9 (1990), the youth magazine of the TSB Bank, which gave its readers 'nine reasons that explain why New Age is good, is right and ready for now', and then asked 'Could you get into New Age?', and gave an address to write to! (p. 6)

5 Some fundamentalists certainly have exaggerated and hyped up the whole New Age phenomenon in this way—and in so doing have arguably made it more difficult for other Christians to engage in meaningful dialogue with New Agers. For an example, see Constance Cumbey, *The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow* (Louisiana: Huntington House, 1983).

6 J. L. Simmons, *The Emerging New Age* (Santa Fe: Bear & Co., 1990), quotations from pp. 7, 12, 14.

7 The Scottish Findhorn Community, based on the Moray Firth, is one such example. Cf. Carol Riddell, *The Findhorn Community* (Findhorn: Findhorn Press, 1991), p. 64.

8 Many New Age therapies and services are advertised through places like wholefood stores and the premises of complementary medical practitioners, though there are also many journals, including the glossy monthly *New Age Journal* as well as those circulated more informally on private networks. The advert for Barbie channeling was spotted in *Common Ground* 72 (1992), p. 80.

9 L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1968), sections 65–78.

10 Lawrence Osborn, *Angels of Light?* (London: Daybreak, 1992), p. xii.

11 Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, p. 30. Of course, the view expressed in this quotation, that we are not victims, raises many serious ethical questions. See further my *What is the New Age Saying to the Church?* pp. 127–134, as well as my paper 'Coming to Terms with the New Age Movement', contained in the Report of the Board of Social Responsibility presented to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, May 1993, pp. 54–57.

12 Ruth Montgomery writes that 'the New Age has begun, but will not be fully recognized as such until the shift of the [earth's magnetic] axis has eradicated some of the evils of the present age...' (*Strangers Among Us*, Fawcett Crest 1979, pp. 30–31). Since there is this expectation that the arrival of the New Age will be heralded by physical changes in the earth itself, the occurrence of earthquakes and volcanic eruptions—especially on the west coast of America—in recent years has fuelled speculation that the Aquarian age is about to dawn. Several groups have established doomsday headquarters, from which they expect to witness (and survive) these events.

13 Capra, *The Turning Point*, p. xvii. See also Capra's work *The Tao of Physics* (London: Fontana, 1976)

14 E. Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 22.

15 For the most comprehensive recent explorations of this, see Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks* (Geneva: WCC, 1986) and *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK, 1989).

16 J. Gordon Melton, *Encyclopedia Handbook of Cults in America* (New York: Garland, 1992 = *Garland Reference Library of Social Science*, vol. 797), p. 164. The whole New Age section of this volume (pp. 163–180) contains a number of perceptive insights.

17 Far from accepting eastern worldviews, the New Age generally ransacks and violates their integrity by picking only those elements which appeal to the western mind. See my *What is the New Age Saying to the Church?* pp. 127ff.

18 For a classic statement along these lines, see Russell Ackoff, *Creating the Corporate Future* (New York: Wiley, 1981), especially ch. 1, pp. 3–24. Ackoff is a well-known professor of business studies, and a leading exponent of systems management.

19 Capra, *The Turning Point*, pp. 21–22.

20 For an account of Christian history and theology from this perspective, see the various works of ex-Dominican Matthew Fox, especially *Wheel We, Wee All the Way Home* (Santa Fe: Bear & Co., 1981) and *Original Blessing* (Santa Fe: Bear & Co., 1983). Fox's questions are more useful than his answers, but that should not deflect us from the need to pay serious attention to his arguments. For an appraisal and critique of some aspects of his work, see my article 'Defining a Biblical Theology of Creation' in *Transformation* 10/2 (1993), pp. 7–11; also Andrew Deeter Dreitzer, 'A New Creation', in *The Way* 29/1 (1989), pp. 4–12; Ted Peters, *The Cosmic Self* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), pp. 120–131; Jane E. Strohl, 'The Matthew Fox Phenomenon', in *Word & World* 8 (Winter 1988), pp. 42–47.

21 On this, see Lawrence Osborn, 'The Gospel in the New Age' in *Gospel and Culture* 18 (Autumn 1993), pp. 1–5.

22 I have made a start on some of these questions in my forthcoming volume, *Evangelism for a New Age: Creating Churches for the Next Century* (London: HarperCollins, 1994)—but there is much more that needs to be done.

23 David Vaughn, *A Faith for the New Age* (London: Regency Press, 1967), quoted in Melton, *Encyclopedic Handbook of Cults...*, p. 164.

24 Jacob Needleman, *Lost Christianity* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1980), p. 35.

25 Ian Wray, 'Buddhism & Psychotherapy', in G. Claxton, *Beyond Therapy* (London: Wisdom Publications, 1986), pp. 160–161.

26 Needleman, *Lost Christianity*, p. 4.

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# EVANGELISM &

**T**he Republic of Ireland has long been regarded as a preserve of a very traditional and conservative genre of Roman Catholicism, but recent years have seen a remarkable growth of openness among the people of the Republic, especially towards the Scriptures. Indeed, there are over four hundred Bible Study Groups functioning, and while many have only a dozen attending, others are very large and have grown into substantial Christian fellowships.

The Presbyterian Church has a number of congregations in the Republic, but most of these (particularly in the rural areas) are extremely small, with only a handful gathering for worship each Sunday.

### Phenomenal Growth

In Kilkenny, deep in the heart of the Irish Republic, the Presbyterian congregation has grown from less than thirty adults in the early 1980s to a worshiping fellowship today well in excess of two hundred. The Sunday School likewise has grown during the same period from two to over one hundred. The mid-week meeting for prayer attracts over fifty, and the evening service over one hundred. This kind of growth has been unheard of this century in the south of Ireland. Indeed, so great has been the growth that a brand new Church has been built within the past two years.

The minister is John Woodside, who heads a two man team with Billy Paterson, a Presbyterian Church 'lay

agent', as his colleague; together they have been used of God in a quite remarkable way. Much of the growth has arisen from evangelistic outreach in the streets and from Bible Study Groups in local hotels and housing estates. In a community where over 95% are traditionally Roman Catholic, it is obvious that the Presbyterian congregation in Kilkenny is now formed largely of former Catholics who have found a living faith in Christ.

### New Strategy

At the Belfast headquarters of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Rev. David Temple and Rev. Derek Poots (along with others) recently examined the possibilities for further Church growth and

Church planting, and it was decided to set up an experimental five year development ministry in which a young minister, Stephen Johnston, along with five lay workers, would cover an area of 6,000 sq. miles and a population of almost one million. These six would act as a ministry team seeking to develop the opportunities that exist in the Republic of Ireland today.

This team will be covering an area of the south east of the Republic from Portlaoise and Carlow right down to Fermoy near Cork in the far south, taking in the major towns of Portlaoise, Carlow, Athy, Naas, Kilkenny, Clonmel, Cahir, Tipperary and Fermoy.

### New Development Ministry

Stephen Johnston is a young minister who, along with his wife Ruth and their two sons, Timothy and Philip, has moved from Belfast to live in Kilkenny as their base. Stephen's remit includes: leading services of worship in Carlow, Cahir and Fermoy, encouraging development within these congregations, planning various events (e.g. evangelistic Bible Studies) as a means of reaching into the local communities, and working in close co-operation with the five local lay workers (Irish Mission workers).

The combination of the unordained worker and ordained pastor-teacher is

in the **IRISH**

# CHURCH GROWTH

one with much potential, especially in the context of the Republic. The work of the 'lay agents' is tied into that of the potential new Christian fellowships, and so the basic foot-slogging round the doors has a specific focus in new Bible Study Groups to which those who are being awakened to the Gospel can be introduced. The lay workers also organise children's Bible clubs and Youth Fellowships.

## Growth not Death!

The creation of such a work in itself is an indication that there is a new day in Southern Ireland as regards a hunger for the Word of God. This opportunity should neither be over-stated nor under-stated, but rather grasped. From the standpoint of Protestant churches, Southern Ireland was not seen in the past as a place where there was much prospect of growth. Rather, it was seen as a place characterised by slow but steady decline. The new team members do not share such a pessimistic outlook; indeed, with the creation of this five-year project the signal is being sent out that, with God's blessing, some of the frail and tiny Presbyterian fellowships in the Republic may experience growth rather than death!

The location and nature of this new work is designed to fit in with what God is already doing. In any Christian work,

it is important to sit down and prayerfully ask certain questions. For example: 'Where is God at work?', and 'How do we fit in with what God is doing?'.

In other words, we must learn to adapt to God's plan as opposed to imposing *our* plan on God and then asking him to bless it. It is evident that God has graciously blessed the work in Kilkenny. Therefore, moving from that centre, the new development ministry seeks to work in the wider region.

Within that wider region, there is specific work in the three locations of Carlow, Cahir and Fermoy. The understanding is that if encouraging signs are observed in some of these locations then a more concentrated effort will be made. With such thinking, there is a genuine desire to fit in with what God has planned for the area.

## A Start Has Been Made

Right at the start, financial investment was needed in that the Presbyterian building in Carlow required repair and renovation work. An adequate and attractive base from which to operate was needed.

In Cahir, there is already a little group of over twenty believers meeting every week. Alongside the ongoing work associated with the fellowship, the team hope soon to conduct some evangelistic Bible Studies in the area.

In Fermoy, Bible Studies have been held in a local hotel and a considerable amount of door-to-door visitation has been done with the help of one of the lay agents. This work is never the easiest to do. Given the tireless activity of the cults, much confusion is being sown in the town. Therefore it is vital that the Apostolic Gospel is presented wisely and well.

## A Challenge to Scotland

We at Rutherford House would like to keep in touch with the development of this church-planting project in the Republic of Ireland. We feel there are important lessons for Scotland. (Those living and working in Northern Ireland are also watching this work with the keenest of interest).

In a decade when the Church of Scotland (among other denominations) is in crisis, how encouraging to learn of expansion, development and a vision for a growing church. Pray therefore that God will be pleased to bless this work in the Republic of Ireland. And pray that where our own churches are languishing, struggling and (let's face it—in some areas) dying, growth and new life will become an option we will be willing to consider.

Perhaps the best posture in which to consider such a possibility is on *our knees*. It's not often we pray together kneeling. Is it time to return to that out-dated(?) practice of *kneeling* before the Almighty to plead his grace.

*(Extracted and expanded from an article in 'The Christian Irishman' by David Temple and Stephen Johnston)*

# REPUBLIC

# Anne Allen meets

*Most Americans who come to the pretty village of Drumnadrochit near the shores of Loch Ness are following the tartan tourist trail in search of the ever elusive Nessie. For one American however Drumnadrochit has been home, ministry and life-centre for the past fourteen years. Tall, rangy Bart Buell was called to minister to the congregations of Urquhart and Glenmoriston in 1980. He came to this work with a rich and varied background of ministry in different cultures.*

**Anne** Bart, could you tell us a little of your upbringing and background?

**Bart** I grew up in a religious, church-going family in Montana, USA. Through my teenage years, I never questioned my relationship with God which I had been taught to believe and accept. But my passive notions of faith were challenged when I left High School to study in a Lutheran College. There I came into contact with converted, vibrant Christians, and with biblical preaching.

I heard an explanation of Ephesians 2:7-8:

...that in the coming ages he might shew the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God...

It blew my mind. A fellow-student led me to saving faith in Christ, and my life was transformed.

**Ann** In what way was your life 'transformed' by your new faith?



**Bart** As well as my life-style being deeply affected, the whole direction of my life changed. A few years after my conversion, I responded to the Lord's call to work in Asia with the Overseas Missionary Fellowship. But I did not guess that when I left America for Japan, I would never again make my home in the land of my birth!

**Anne** How is it, then, that an American from Montana has ended up as parish minister in Drumnadrochit—deep in the Scottish Highlands?

**Bart** In Asia, I met and married Margaret Aitken, a young Scottish missionary. Together, we worked for ten years in Japan, and then ten years in Singapore. But it was when our three daughters needed senior school education that our thoughts turned to Scotland.

**Ann** Why the Church of Scotland?

**Bart** Throughout our twenty years

in the East, Holyrood Abbey Church in Edinburgh had given us both enormous encouragement and support. We had regularly received tapes of James Philip's sermons, as well letters from those in the Holyrood Prayer fellowship who prayed for us faithfully. In addition to all this, there had been loving friendship and interest in us during our periods of 'home assignment'. It was during our stays in Edinburgh that I became aware of a growing number of ministries in Scotland in which biblical teaching and the life of prayer were priorities.

So I was strongly drawn to be part of a fellowship of like-minded ministers whose method of ministry was expository preaching. When I applied to the Church of Scotland, and was accepted, I took it that this was where God wanted me for the rest of my working life.

**Ann** How did you come to settle in Drumnadrochit?

**Bart** After a year in New College, and an Assistantship at Morden in Edinburgh, I found myself preaching in 1980 in an Inverness Church to a vacancy committee from Drumnadrochit, though I knew nothing whatsoever about the parish or its people. We were unanimously invited to accept the Call, and gladly responded and the Manse here in Drumnadrochit has been our home ever since.

*A new and very different ministry was beginning and Bart took to it all his experience of the hard, slow and difficult work of the Gospel in some Asian cultures. He remembers feelings of expectancy, anticipation and*

# Bart Buell

*apprehension. Aware, with all his cross-cultural experience, that Scotland too has many different sub-cultures, he set himself to assess slowly the needs of his own parish and the people now in his care...*

**Bart** After some months of reflection and observation during which I was coming to know my folks here in the parishes of Urquhart and Glenmoriston, I concluded I needed to focus on three major areas.

I saw that my people needed steady bible teaching; indeed, many of them had come from that tradition. Sheep only thrive if well-fed, so that was my number one priority. I also saw that they needed to resolve the dilemma of two church buildings in Drumndrochit. And thirdly, I came to appreciate that they needed to know they were genuinely loved.

**Ann** Bart, it is unusual for a minister to see 'buildings' as a priority for ministry. Tell me how that ranked so high in your thinking?

**Bart** Well, my Drumndrochit congregation was the result of a union of two congregations, both of which had had their own church building. But we were now left with less than 150 people worshipping in two buildings, alternating between them, Sunday by Sunday, and also responsible for the fabric of both, while neither church was able to offer adequate hall accommodation.

It doesn't take much experience or imagination to guess that loyalties within both congregation and wider community were divided. For many, the old



Parish Church was the obvious choice; for others, the former United Free Church held greater significance. But attachments to each ran very deep. I saw that the buildings each represented for a different group of people a sense of belonging and security, a place of spiritual roots, tradition and personal history.

Ultimately, only one building could be used and maintained as a place of worship, and no compromise solution was available. The General Assembly of 1986, advised by its own Special Commission, decided that the Old Parish Church should be used in preference to the former U. F. Church.

**Ann** How was that ruling by the General Assembly taken by your people?

**Bart** I was aware of the real heart-ache and pain experienced by many people in the parish. But I felt that my response must be one of acceptance of, and submission to, the Assembly's decision. My role must be to hold together the whole of my congregation in their disagree-

ment on this issue.

**Ann** Do you think it was the right decision by the Assembly?

**Bart** My response to that question can only be that we as a congregation have proved that God does all things well, and that all things do work together for good. Because in 1992, a beautiful new suite of halls was opened, right beside the Old Parish Church. The new halls cost £119,000 and by the time they were dedicated and in use, they were totally paid for.

*I have had the privilege of seeing the new halls. They are a superb achievement for a congregation of 140. Their design was conceived by an architect's draughtsman member and its cruciform shape houses rooms used by the flourishing Sunday School, the Mother and Toddler Group, the Woman's Guild, and other organisations. Thus the buildings issue has been resolved and Bart testifies to the grace of God in helping the whole congregation in this. They can be justly proud of the buildings which will admirably serve church and community for many years to come.*

**Ann** What then of the other needs you early identified in your ministry, Bart?

**Bart** It has been my great delight to seek to respond to the need for Bible teaching. After all, twenty years in the East as a missionary had prepared me for that. But my people in Drumndrochit have their own spiritual background and, therefore, expectations. They didn't

want a heavy diet of 'indigestible meat'. A wise and trusted member of the congregation shared this with me: 'You try to give us too much. You tend to be repetitive. People want a 'take away meal' they can feed on through the whole week'.

I listened and have tried to learn from what they were saying to me. I adapted my preaching style from going 'from Dan to Beersheba', that is, trying to cover the whole counsel of God in twenty-five minutes every Sunday. Instead, I focused my preparation on extracting the main teaching points from each passage and extrapolating from them into every day life. I still preached consistently through a book of the Bible, but I took up the challenge of satisfying my people week by week with life-giving truth, mined from God's Word, and presented in a clear, structured form.

*This ministry Bart continued into the mid-week service—so called because he sees it as an extension of the worship of the congregation. There, week by week, folk learned together from the Bible as he explained and exhorted, and the fellowship grew as people prayed and interceded together. The pattern of Word and Prayer was firmly established. No special mission or outreach was superimposed apart from a holiday club for the children each summer. As a result, a remarkable 20% of the village school children attend Sunday School. It's a pattern God has blessed and vindicated.*

**Ann** What part do you see Margaret has played in the ministry of these past fourteen years?

**Bart** I have had to listen to my wife to learn my third main focus, that is, to address the great need of my people to be loved. She has had to say to me again and again: 'You're too negative. Where's the love?'

You see, I have a tendency to 'hammer' my people. I have run into the danger of preaching judgement and hell without the balance of grace and love. I have fallen into the trap of (metaphorically) shaking my fist at my flock, rather than wooing them into the kingdom of

light and life. So Margaret's influence on me has been crucial—calling me to be positive, to warm to my people, to share the riches of divine grace. Her provocative question, 'Where's the love?' is now added to my checklist as I review my preparation each week.

**Ann** Some ministers become entangled in problems over pastoral issues such as non-members requesting baptisms and marriages. How have you coped with these issues?

**Bart** I've tried to see requests for baptism as pastoral opportunities, with the result that many of those who have come to me with such requests have become faithful adherents and members. Marriages are occasions when the church must be seen to welcome those outside of its membership and influence.

**Ann** Looking back over these years of your ministry in Drumnadrochit, have you any regrets? I mean, if you had the time over again, would there be anything you would do that you'd failed to do?

**Bart** Yes. I would mention one thing in particular. I wish that over the years I shared with my Kirk Session more of my own personal concerns and the burdens of the work. I have greatly valued their insights, and I realise now that I could have benefitted earlier from their loving support if only I had shared my vulnerability with them.

**Ann** On a positive note, is there any particular aspect of your ministry in which you have been particularly blessed?

**Bart** I owe more than I can say to Margaret. Much of the good relationship between church and community is due to her influence. She has always shared wholeheartedly in the burden of prayer and pastoral care. The women in the Guild and in the Bible Study have benefitted from her leadership and wisdom. She has become involved with WRI and WRVS and so has forged strong links of love and respect within

the community. We have tried to make our family life accessible and to use every opportunity to express the love of Christ in practical ways.

*A new stage now beckons. Amazingly—for his looks belie his age—Bart Buell retires soon. People say that a congregation can take on the character of its pastor. This may well be the case in Drumnadrochit, for Bart and Margaret will leave behind a flock mature and well taught in the things of Christ. A people with contentious issues resolved. A people ready and eager to serve the Lord.*

*The past fourteen years have been a learning experience for pastor and people, a growing together in mutual love and respect, and in deepening commitment to the Lord and to his cause in Scotland. Would that such an epilogue could be written at the end of every ministry in our parishes.*

**P**ayer Triplets have become a feature of many of our churches. In them people are encouraged to share and to pray together. In one church the pastor, anxious to be a member of one such group, was debarred by his ruling body. 'It is inappropriate for the minister to share with other members of the congregation!'

Such an attitude prompts a whole series of questions. When it comes to 'sharing our hearts', is the pastor exempt? Is the minister above it all, with no need to find a soul friend with whom he can share the deepest needs of his heart or the concerns of his ministry?

Firstly we must be clear what we are talking about. There is a difference between spilling it all out and genuine openness. Paul Helm in an article in *Evangel*<sup>1</sup> stated:

There is a world of difference between telling the truth and telling the whole truth, between speaking honestly when one does speak, and telling all... Those who appeal for frankness do not seem to appreciate this distinction.

He claims that spilling everything out is both unbiblical and unwise and is more like exhibitionism.

The present day emphasis on frankness among Christians seems to have more to do with the modern cultivation of explicitness and 'authenticity' than it does with Christian principle.

Paul Helm seems to be suggesting that there would appear to be limits to how far we should go in opening our hearts. Absolute frankness and openness would be more like *confession* than *sharing*. So when we talk of 'sharing our hearts' as pastors, are we really talking about the absolute exposure of the minutiae of our inner feelings? Could it be that the experience of 'opening our hearts' is much more than the sharing of mere problems, hurts and concerns and is, in fact, something very much deeper? Henry Nouwen suggests that there ought to be a certain reserve.

Real openness to each other also means a real closedness, because only he who can hold a secret can safely share his knowledge... An intimate relationship between people not only asks for mutual openness but also for mutual respectful protection of each other's uniqueness... Just as words lose their power when they are not born out of silence, so openness loses its meaning when there is no ability to be closed.<sup>2</sup>

The openness, or sharing, which we are examining is much more than a deeply

humiliating inner striptease. Rather we are looking for an openness, or, rather, a closedness, which respects the inner citadel of a person's being while sharing at a deep and meaningful level.

### **Empathy, Prayer, Understanding**

When Juan Carlos Ortiz, then pastor of a church in Buenos Aires, visited this country some years ago he earned the title 'the mashed potato man'. He claimed that Christians lived like potatoes with their skins on, such was the nature of their superficial and somewhat distant relationship with each other. 'We need' he claimed, 'to be like mashed potatoes'. Certainly the New Testament encourages a closeness and oneness of heart, an openness to each other's anxieties and concerns. 'Carry each other's burden' (Gal. 6:2). 'Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others' (Phil. 2:4). If all Christians have a responsibility to share the burdens of their fellow believers can pastors be exempt from this essential ministry? Our empathy, informed prayer and compassionate understanding of a colleague's situation can do much to lighten his load and strengthen his ministry.

### **Pastor and People**

The encouragement of the New Testament is reinforced by the example of Paul. He practised what he preached. He was remarkably open with other Christians about his own experiences, reactions and feelings. He writes to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 6:1f.):

We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withhold-

# **Sharing our Hearts — can we?**

ing our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also.

The primary reference here is, of course, to the relationship between a Christian leader and those for whom he is responsible. This prompts the further question as to how open a pastor should be, about himself, to his people. If Paul, however, is open to his readers, is he not also encouraging openness between colleagues in Christian service?

Again, he anticipates openness, or mutual encouragement, when he looks forward to arriving in Rome. He hopes 'that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith' (Rom. 1:12). He has no intention of being closed up, reticent or aloof when he is among the hitherto unmet Roman Christians. He doesn't expect them to be either. His letters, too, to the young pastor Timothy are full of personal testimony, sharing and openness of heart about his inner feelings, hopes and reactions.

We are not surprised, given his understanding of peace through the Cross, that Paul pleads for a new relationship between believers: 'Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God' (Rom. 15:7).

the prelude to turning toward God's strengthening grace. 'I share with you my "conflicts on the outside, fears within" so that I can say "Brethren, pray for me" '.

Two facts are obvious in general about the sharing of the apostle. He never even verges on exhibitionism. His sharing has its roots in a fellowship in the Gospel and its end purpose has, as its two-fold goal, the edification and enrichment of others and the expression of Godly dependence. Henry Nouwen<sup>3</sup> puts it perfectly:

Mutual confession becomes a mutual deepening of hope, and sharing weakness becomes a reminder to one and all of the coming strength.

On the face of it, then, there is strong authority for sharing our hearts, for openness regarding our concerns, fears and hopes. The responsibility so to do is laid upon all Christians and was exercised by the apostle.

The real problems arise when we begin to think of the pastor's situation.

He is often inhibited in his sharing by his loneliness and isolation. So often there is no one in his congregation with whom he can share or experience fellowship on a deep level. It is accepted that there is an essential loneliness in

perturbably as the bronze figure takes the tempest.<sup>5</sup>

Many a pastor feels he has to give the impression of being a 'bronze figure', showing complete serenity in every situation, displaying a perfect ability to cope with every pressure and being an utter stranger to feelings of hurt, puzzlement and bruised love. The role model, too easily adopted, is that of superior piety, exemplary reactions. The pastor feels inhibited in giving an appearance of weakness by opening his heart. He is even reluctant to give colleagues the impression that he is not what he appears to be or that he is a vessel of clay. The result is often, towards congregation and colleagues, a strange aloofness.

Many who are in deep need... find their ministers distant men who do not want to burn their fingers... they are unable to be close to anyone.<sup>6</sup>

There are also limits imposed by our need to trust our colleagues or those with whom we share. What is demanded is not merely trust of the other's confidentiality, but trust in their ability to understand and appreciate and to be sensitive to the particular problems faced by the pastor. Many a younger pastor has turned away in disappointment from an older, perhaps retired colleague. The opportunity to share had been welcomed with the hope of tasting something of the mature wisdom of years. Instead contemporary problems and concerns were looked at with yesterday's understanding and yesterday's answers were unthinkingly offered.

### A Spiritual Director

Our conclusions can be summarised. Our openness with each other in Christ's service has New Testament authority by precept and example. Even our Lord was not afraid to admit 'his need' of the disciples. 'My soul is very sorrowful even unto death... watch with me'. There may be a reserve in our openness because of respect for inner closedness or lack of trust or confidence in the other. Our acknowledgement of weakness,

## We need to be like mashed potatoes.

There is no way, given our understanding of the Saviour's acceptance of us, that we can hold each other at arm's length. To revert to the illustration of Ortiz, the Cross has peeled the skins off and we relate. There is no place for the pride and jealousy which, sadly and commonly, keep pastors from relating to one another.

### The Pastor's Weakness

Paul was not slow to admit to his weakness and need: 'I came to you in weakness and fear, with much trembling' is not the statement of a self contained, aloof Christian leader. His sharing of need and weakness was not, however, an exercise in self-pity and complaint. Rather it was

Christian leadership. When D. E. Hoste was appointed to succeed Hudson Taylor as General Director of the China Inland Mission he stated, 'And now I have no one, no one but God'.<sup>4</sup> Many a pastor feels that way.

### The Pastor's Loneliness

The pastor also suffers, rightly or wrongly, from powerful inhibitions. Often he is the target for criticism, even hostility. Yet he is expected to absorb it all in silence, without reaction. Ernest Gordon, writing of his father, A. J. Gordon, said:

If blasts of ridicule dash him in the face, he is to take it silently and im-

even when shared, is a prelude to dependence upon divine grace. It is not indulgent exhibitionism.

All this places a challenge before the pastor, not to indiscriminate 'sharing', but to the development of a special relationship. Perhaps the next step, not often taken in evangelical circles, but increasingly presented to us as possessing immense value, is that of finding a Spiritual Director. Eugene Peterson describes his responsibility.

Spiritual direction is the act of paying attention to God, calling

attention to God, being attentive to God in a person or circumstances or situation. A prerequisite is standing back, doing nothing. It opens a quiet eye of adoration. It releases the energetic wonder of faith. It notices the Invisibilities in and beneath and around the Visibilities. It listens to the silences between the spoken sounds.<sup>7</sup>

If the pastor is happy who has one with whom he can share then twice blessed is the pastor who has a soul friend who can direct him to see, react and think in

that way. As he does so he moves ever nearer to the 'Shepherd and Overseer of our souls'. (1 Peter 2:25).

#### Notes

- 1 *Evangel*, Volume 3:1, p. 15
- 2 *Reaching Out*, p. 32
- 3 *The Wounded Healer*, p. 94
- 4 *Spiritual Leadership*, J. Oswald Sanders, p. 107
- 5 *Spiritual Leadership*, J. Oswald Sanders, p. 64
- 6 *The Wounded Healer*, p. 71
- 7 *Under the Predictable Plant*, p. 181

# Science & the Citizen

Stephen Hawking's now legendary book, *A Brief History of Time*, has been a best-seller for almost five years and has popularised cosmology as effectively as Coca-Cola have universalised their peculiar brown brew.

Although I'm sure that most of the people who bought *A Brief History* have only ever dipped into it, and would have the greatest difficulty in explaining what it says in a sentence or two, another series of his essays, *Black Holes and Baby Universes* (Bantam—he wants it to sell in airport bookstalls—£16.99), has hit the shops and the papers and we will all troop out and buy it. Which is astonishing.

## Weird Science

Cosmology, and any science with the prefix 'new' (New Physics, New Biol-

ogy) have all become Big News and Big Sellers. I suppose it was only as unlikely as darts, snooker or chess becoming major TV features. Even the graffiti artists are on the cosmological bandwagon:

'Is there intelligent life on earth?'  
'Yes, but I'm only visiting!'

Or... 'My other universe is relatively closed'.

You need a degree in philosophy to understand graffiti these days.

Yet before Stephen Hawking started writing, physicists like Paul Davies were producing far more accessible books, which were never best-sellers. But Hawking has intelligence, charisma and a great PR machine. He is far more modest in his claims, however, than many who quote him to justify their own sweeping statements.

## Big Bang, Big Questions

When scientists found evidence of the ripples that are the last vestiges of the Big Bang, 15,000 million light-years out at the edge of the universe, some announced, 'We have solved the riddle of the universe.' Phooey!

We may have taken further steps in confirming the current theories, but we are no nearer to answering the basic questions of the universe. Why did it all begin? Why are we all here? Is there

meaning and purpose to be found in my life?

But it's all fascinating stuff, and for many of us, the new theories serve only to reinforce our faith and increase our sense of wonder and awe at all the Father has created through the Son.

### **'It is all over with Priests and gods when man becomes Scientific'**

That great 19th century atheist Friedrich Nietzsche could not have been more wrong! He proves the old adage, 'He who marries the spirit of the age is sure to be a widow in the next.' Recent scientific developments have pushed the realms of science and religion closer together than they have been for centuries. This is what makes good TV and popular books. The major series *Soul*, screened on BBC2 last year, explored the spiritual implications of new scientific thinking on cosmology, evolution and brain science. There was lots of talk of 'God' and of the 'Soul' of the Universe. American atheist Frank Tipler claimed that the theories of global relativity have driven him back to God.

But we must be cautious of these scientific conversions. Newton was right when he warned, 'Physics, beware metaphysics!' When many of this new breed of polymaths and metaphysicists use the word 'god' they do not have the personal God of the Bible in mind, or anything approaching biblical faith. So, the Oxford mathematician, Danah Zohar says, 'It's only been in the last few years, understanding the implications of quantum physics and the new cosmology that I have found a way back to faith. It is a complete reinterpretation of faith, and yet one that is meaningful to the modern mind...'.

### **'Traditional Dictates?'**

However, Zohar goes on to make wholly unjustified comments about Christianity: 'It is no longer possible to believe in both the discoveries of modern science and in the traditional dictates of the church...'. (*The Quantum Self*, Flamingo, 1991). I'm not sure what 'traditional dictates' she had in mind, but the world is full of scientists who do seem to find it possible to believe in modern

science and the teaching of the historic church. Indeed, many scientists and non-scientists discover their faith deepened and their trust in the Bible confirmed through their study of science and cosmology.

### **'In the beginning, God...'**

Many of the newer ideas underline much of the Church's biblical teaching down through the ages. As Christians, we are not surprised by Unified Theories, for from Genesis to Revelation, the Bible teaches that there is a oneness and internal cohesion and simplicity about the cosmos, because it has its origins and consummation in Christ Jesus.

Zohar's work also raises intriguing possibilities in the area of finite humanity relating to an infinite God. She takes Fritjof Capra's classic works on the New Physics and its reinforcement of Eastern mysticism and New Age (*The Tao of Physics* and *The Turning Point*, Fontana) one stage further. Her examination of quantum theory and human consciousness provides an explanation for the subtle intermeshing of human relationships and the interplay of conscious beings with time and eternity.

### **Anthropic principles**

The Church has often been criticised for claiming that the cosmos was created for humanity. That is certainly how the Bible reads. But maybe it is now how modern science reads as well? In this ever more bizarre universe, there appears to be an almost unbelievable connection between the observer and the observed, sometimes expressed as the Strong Anthropic Principle. Consciousness acts as the midwife to reality. So, many scientists are arguing that quantum physics has put humankind back at the centre of the Universe. As Physicist Paul Davies puts it, 'It seems as though the existence of mind and consciousness in the universe is something that is in some sense meant to be...we're not just a trivial add-on to the universe, we are truly written into the script'.

### **So What?**

Well, you could just keep your head down and wait till the next batch of

cosmological theories come along. Perhaps there will be one more to your liking.

Or you could join the young earth creationists, espouse creation science and simply fit new experimental and observational details into your own version of cosmology and modern science. This is a lone furrow to plough, but some Christians have chosen this path as their way of reconciling their interpretation of the Bible and their study of science.

Or you can simply deny the theories—they are after all only theories. Remember that scientists are often wrong, but they are never unsure of themselves! Hawking and the theoreticians are undoubtedly running ahead of experimental science. As Harvard's Sidney Coleman puts it, 'Are we really getting somewhere or are we running in circles? Difficult to tell, but we're having fun. It exercises the mind'.

Worst of all, you can just push God into all the gaps in our present understanding and say, 'There you are—they can't explain consciousness! That proves there is a God!'

### **'The Heavens declare the glory of God...'**

Had the Psalmist been aware of modern cosmology, he would have had even more reason to worship God. And worship is an appropriate response to all the new developments, whether they turn out to be true or just another step along the way to more convincing theories. We have nothing to fear, for it is 'By faith we understand the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible' (Heb. 11:3). The book writers and the programme makers give us a marvellous opportunity to point to the wonder of God, whom the Bible and our hearts reveal as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator of all things.

(Nick Mercer is Assistant Principal of London Bible College)

## Reviews

### Prayers for Use in Church

Jack Masterton  
Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 1993,  
£5.95, p/b  
ISBN 07152 068 0

Any book designed to help a minister in his preparation for public worship is to be welcomed. This is an inflated and revised edition of a work originally published in 1970.

According to the author, a parish minister, the book seeks to reflect two developments in liturgy over the intervening period. The first is the move away from the time-honoured 'Thou' or 'Thee'. The second concerns the desire for greater lay participation. His general aim is 'to produce the prayers that have the accent of today and yet are formal and reverent'.

On the whole, the author succeeds in his aim. Part I is notable for its good use of Scriptural themes (e.g. God is, Creator, Father, Saviour, Judge; the seven deadly sins) while creative expression of contemporary issues including drug addiction, child abuse and homelessness, abound. Some might be put off by the use of standard congregational responses but in my view this has often more to do with historical prejudice than liturgical practice. These responses need only be used at the minister's discretion. There are some memorable phrases especially in the prayers of confession, an element which in its specifics is often under-emphasized in public worship. By contrast the praise of God, especially in the opening prayers, seems too short and somewhat inadequate for bringing a worshipping congregation into the presence of God.

Part II contains altogether 14 orders of service for different seasons of the Christian year. This will prove a helpful resource, especially to younger ministers, for occasions such as Remembrance Sunday or Harvest Thanksgiving.

Like all such books this compendium of public prayers will be best used when it is sensitively combined with the minister's own distinctive style of expression. 'Above all, to thine own self be true', is the axiom here and not all the prayers will appeal theologically or liturgically. More judicious editing could have

spared us elements of bad layout (p. 114), archaic language ('alms' p. 12, 'Chaplet' p. 92) and simple error (Prison 'warders' not 'wardens' p. 129) and well meaning but easily misunderstood phrases ('persuade us to rescue the many black sheep in our land' p. 24). Despite these criticisms this book should prove a helpful practical resource to younger and older ministers looking for creative and fresh expression in the vital realm of public prayer.

*Rev. David J. B. Anderson, Edinburgh*

### You Can Change The World

Jill Johnstone  
OM Publishing, Carlisle, n.p., h/b  
ISBN 1 8507 7

I enjoyed this, the children's version of *Operation World*, from the positive title to all the information packed into it. Children are very aware of global issues and they do care. This book helps them to understand how other children around the world live. For adults 'it is a small world' but for children the world is vast. This book helps to make the world seem smaller. Children learn of major disasters through television, but here they can learn of the many areas that need their help and prayers in daily living. Naming individual children in different countries and the problems they face makes it easier for the children reading this book to relate to them.

The guide-lines for prayer in each section give children a positive way to help people. It is in straightforward language and easily understood, which helps to reinforce the idea that we don't need elaborate words and phrases to talk to God. My only criticism is that some of the sketches illustrating life in the various countries are rather poor.

An older child would enjoy this book on its own. However, its main value would be in use during family worship or as an aid for Sunday School prayers.

*Mrs Heather Fettes, North Kessock*

### Shaping Tomorrow Starting Today

Geoffrey Grogan (ed.)  
Christian Focus Publications, 1992;  
192pp., £5.99, p/b  
ISBN 1 85792 007 4

As might be expected from a college

where theological study is undertaken in the context of both personal devotion and practical service, this collection of essays published to celebrate the centenary of the founding of Glasgow Bible College (formerly the Bible Training Institute) combines considerable insight into the present state of the Church with the challenge to act now to shape the future. The biographical details of the contributors (who have all either trained or taught at the College) reveal the influence which the College has had on the life of the Church throughout the world.

The essays, like all collections, vary in quality but are held together by the clear structure given by the editor, a former Principal. The chapters cover the Church's relationship to Christ, the Bible, worship, theology, ministry, outreach at home and overseas; concluding with a fascinating statistical study of the Church as it is today and is likely to be at the end of this century.

For a book that looks to the future there is little that is new within it; but this is not a weakness. It offers no novel solutions to the ills of the Church, but rather challenges us to work out the implications of the clear principles of Scripture.

The book avoids (or explains) theological terms and is therefore accessible to the general reader. It will be read with profit by all who know the College, and anyone with a concern for the future of the Church.

*Rev. Tony A. R. Fowler, Paisley*

### Why Do People Suffer?

James Jones  
Lion Publishing, 1993, 96pp., £5.99,  
p/b  
ISBN 0 7459 2419 0

Is it possible to answer such a question in less than 100 pages? Probably not. However, no volume of any size would come close to answering this most fundamental problem of faith.

*Why Do People Suffer?* is bright, well illustrated, and easy to read. There are sections covering topics such as healing, our part in suffering and God's sometimes seeming indifference to our plight. Although I found the section discussing

the origins of suffering questionable, here lies the book's strength. It is not afraid to deal with thorny problems about which we all will have our own ideas, and to which we will all have to find solutions. As an introduction to a difficult subject it is to be commended.

*Rev. Derek Broun,  
Chaplain, Raigmore Hospital, Inverness*

#### **Holy Land Pilgrimage: A guide for visitors**

Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland, Middle East Relationships Committee, 1992, 44pp., £1.95  
ISBN 0 85169 226 5

Visitors to the Holy Land usually travel in groups, live in luxury hotels, ride between Bible sites in air-conditioned coaches full of similar groups and enjoy the ministry of a familiar spiritual leader. This booklet's purpose is to suggest alternatives to such insularity and it encourages tour operators and visitors to incorporate into their visit interaction with local people of all faiths and especially Christians, with an emphasis on Palestinians (a word used in this book to include Israeli Arabs). This is with a view to deepening one's own faith through contact with other religious cultures and to giving encouragement to fellow Christians who are part of a minority group that appreciates friendship. Contact details are given to enable the tour organiser to set up opportunities for talks and meetings.

The information is limited and could include greater information, such as which churches are able to provide simultaneous translation into English, but at its price the book is worth having and prompted by its main thrust the visitor/tour organiser can make enquiries tailored to his specific interest.

*Mr Iain D. Gill, Edinburgh*

#### **Blasphemy and the Law in a Plural Society**

Rick Simpson  
Grove Booklets on Ethics, No. 90,  
25pp., £2.25  
ISBN 1 85174 241 7

This booklet is a very helpful and valuable contribution to the discussion of an important issue for Christians. In just

25 pages Simpson considers many of the difficult and complex issues raised by the nature of our secular and plural society. Basically he argues that the law on blasphemy should be replaced by a law preventing deliberate incitement to religious or racial hatred.

The main argument is that the positive purpose of the third commandment, namely the protection of the glory and majesty of God's Name, is best accomplished in our society by the consistent and holy lives of those who believe in that Name. So, instead of defending the law of blasphemy as a bulwark against secularisation or irreligion, he turns it into a missionary opportunity. Simpson takes the responsibility of defending the glory of God's Name away from the legal system and places it where it belongs, with God's people. A useful and challenging book.

*Rev. Klaus Buwert, Kinlochleven*

#### **The Scale of Perfection**

Walter Hilton (ed.), Halcyon Backhouse Hodder & Stoughton Christian Classics, 1992, 144 pp., £3.50  
ISBN 0 340 54493 2

Walter Hilton (c. 1340–1396) was probably an Augustinian canon in a Nottinghamshire priory. According to Halcyon Backhouse, this book has had 'the most widespread and enduring influence of all English devotional writings'.

The scale of perfection has three main steps:

First, to know (about) God, through reason, discussion, teaching and Bible study. Hilton was steeped in Scripture and used it well to make and illustrate points and only on occasions does he allegorise.

Second, to love God. The lower form of this is a state of ardour, an experience of the fragrance of Jesus, a small taste of the love of God. The higher form is full of rest and quiet, a delight in prayer and thoughts of God and his Name, a feeding of the spirit upon God.

Third, to know and love God perfectly. So perfectly do we see God that we are overwhelmed by his love, and the soul becomes one with him. We may feel the beginning of this in our life here,

but its perfection is reserved for bliss of heaven.

To climb this scale we must be humble, firm in faith and in will to seek after God. We must learn how to pray and meditate, and resist the 'dark image' or pride and other deadly sins in our souls. We must seek to recover the image lost in Adam, and to be transfigured by the Holy Spirit 'through humility and love into the likeness of Christ's humanity'.

We may not agree with Hilton's call for unquestioning obedience to 'the faith of holy church' as a test of true humility, or with his teaching that while all the redeemed receive an essential reward in heaven those who ascend the scale of perfection—martyrs, preachers and celibates—receive in addition an aureole. But if we are in earnest about giving time for meditation in our prayers, and long for deeper sanctification, this book has much to teach us. Most of all, perhaps, it is a privilege to keep company with such a choice spirit as Hilton.

Hilton's personal humility shines out, 'I will be greatly encouraged to see somebody else receive more of God's grace that I have'. And there is down to earth humanity too, 'If you are praying and your neighbour arrives to talk with you, you should speak with him at once. You are not leaving God behind. You should bring God with you as you speak'.

*Rev. Dr William G. Young,  
North Kessock*